**Diet, Nutrition, and Oral Health**

Brushing and flossing your teeth daily are essential to a healthy smile, but did you know that diet and nutrition can also impact your oral health?[[1]](#endnote-2) The saying, “you are what you eat,” holds true even when it comes to keeping your mouth, gums, and teeth healthy. Nutritious foods are critical to oral health as well as your overall health and well-being.

Diet, nutrition, and oral health all impact each other. Your diet can affect your teeth and the tissue of your mouth and gums, and the health of your mouth and teeth can affect what you are able to eat and the nutrients you get. This is especially true if you have gum disease or have lost teeth and find it harder to eat certain foods.[[2]](#endnote-3) Eating a variety of nutritious foods promotes healthy teeth and gums.[[3]](#endnote-4)

Below are some tips for good oral health:

* Consume a balanced diet that includes nutritious foods such as fruits, vegetables, lean proteins, whole grains, and low-fat or fat-free dairy.
* Resist the urge to frequently snack or sip on sugary treats or drinks like hard or sticky candy or soda and sports drinks. This creates an environment for decay and exposes your teeth to frequent acid attacks.

If you do snack, choose wisely. Make nutritious choices like raw or cooked vegetables, fruits, plain low-fat or fat-free yogurt, unsalted nuts, or whole grain crackers.

Enjoy calcium-rich foods, such as low-fat or fat-free milk, yogurt, and cheese, and fortified soy milk to help promote strong teeth and bones. Other sources of calcium include tofu (made with calcium sulfate), canned salmon, almonds, and some dark green leafy vegetables.

Make sure you get enough vitamin C, which promotes gum health and is found in many sources, including citrus fruits, tomatoes, peppers, broccoli, potatoes, and spinach.

Drink plenty of water, with fluoride if available.

Limit alcohol consumption.

Eating a well-balanced meal might be a challenge for you. Your local Aging Services provider can help by connecting you with the Senior Nutrition Program (SNP). Through the SNP, you can have nutritious meals delivered to your home or get your meals at a congregate meal site (e.g., senior center). SNP participants value the meals they receive. Eighty percent of all participants say the program helps them stay in their home, and 96% would recommend it to a friend.[[4]](#endnote-5) For over half of SNP participants, the meal they receive provides half or more of their total food for the day.[[5]](#endnote-6) To find your local SNP, visit the [Eldercare Locator website](https://eldercare.acl.gov/Public/Index.aspx) or call 1-800-677-1116.

If problems with your oral health make it hard for you to eat, ask your senior nutrition provider if they can help by providing meals that are easier for you to chew and swallow.

1. [Healthy Nutrition for Healthy Teeth](https://www.eatright.org/food/vitamins-and-supplements/nutrient-rich-foods/healthy-nutrition-for-healthy-teeth) (Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics) [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
2. [Touger-Decker, Riva PhD, RD, FADA Nutrition and Oral Health in Older Adults, Topics in Clinical Nutrition: July 2005 - Volume 20 - Issue 3 - p 211-218](https://journals.lww.com/topicsinclinicalnutrition/Abstract/2005/07000/Nutrition_and_Oral_Health_in_Older_Adults.5.aspx) [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
3. [Healthy Nutrition for Healthy Teeth](https://www.eatright.org/food/vitamins-and-supplements/nutrient-rich-foods/healthy-nutrition-for-healthy-teeth) (Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics) [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
4. ACL’s 2018 Evaluation of the Older Americans Act Nutrition Services Program Outcomes Report – Part II; U.S. Census Bureau Population Data; The National Foundation to End Senior Hunger and Feeding America’s “The State of Senior Hunger in America 2016.” [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
5. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)