



Dental Health – Fluoride Treatment

Fluoride is a mineral that occurs naturally in many foods and water. Every day, minerals are added to and lost from a tooth's enamel layer through two processes: demineralization and remineralization. Minerals are lost (demineralization) from a tooth's enamel layer when acids - formed from plaque bacteria and sugars in the mouth - attack the enamel.

Fluoride helps prevent tooth decay by making the tooth more resistant to acid attacks. It also reverses early decay. In children under six years of age, fluoride becomes incorporated as the permanent teeth develop, making it difficult for acids to demineralize the teeth. Fluoride also helps speed remineralization and disrupts acid production in already erupted teeth of both children and adults.

In What Forms is Fluoride Available?

Fluoride can be found naturally in food and water but can also be directly applied to the teeth through fluoridated toothpastes and mouth rinses. Mouth rinses containing fluoride in lower strengths are available over the counter; stronger concentrations require a doctor's prescription.

A dentist in his or her office can also apply fluoride to the teeth as a gel, foam, or varnish. These treatments contain a much higher level of fluoride than the amount found in toothpastes and mouth rinses.

Fluoride supplements are also available as liquids and tablets and must be prescribed by your dentist, pediatrician or family doctor.

Is There an Age at which Fluoride Intake is Most Critical?

It is very important for infants and children between the ages of 6 months and 16 years to be exposed to fluoride. This is the time frame during which the primary and permanent teeth come in. However, adults benefit from fluoride, too.

In addition, people with certain conditions may be at increased risk of tooth decay and would therefore benefit from additional fluoride treatment:

- **Dry mouth conditions** – The lack of saliva makes it harder for food particles to be washed away and for acids to be neutralized.
- **Gum disease** – Also called gingivitis, gum disease can expose more of your teeth and their roots to bacteria increasing the chance of tooth decay.
- **History of frequent cavities** – If you have one cavity every year or every other year, you might benefit from additional fluoride.
- **Presence of crowns and/or bridges or braces** – These treatments can put teeth at risk for decay at the point where the crown meets the underlying tooth structure or around the brackets of orthodontic appliances.

Fluoride is one of the most significant ingredients to help prevent or reduce the incidence of dental cavities. The use of fluoride in conjunction with brushing, flossing and regular dental care is the most likely way to get your dentist to say what all patients love to hear, “No cavities, I’ll see you in six months!”