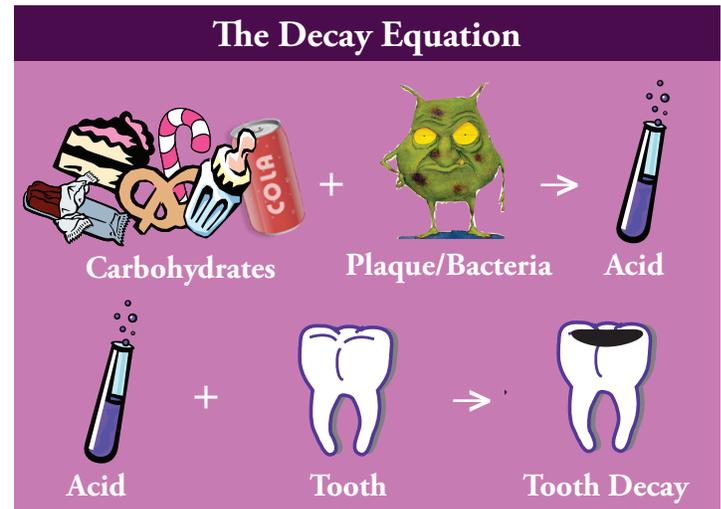


# Tooth Decay

## How Tooth Decay Happens

Three things are needed for tooth decay to occur - a tooth, carbohydrates (sweets and starches), and bacteria (germs). Bacteria in the mouth use sweet and starchy foods and drinks to make acid. After repeated acid attacks, the tooth enamel can break down, and a hole or cavity forms in the tooth.

As soon as a baby's first teeth appear - usually by age 6 months - a child is at risk for tooth decay. Tooth decay can cause difficulty with eating, sleeping, and speaking. It can also affect a child's ability to do well in school or an adult's ability to work.



## Preventing Tooth Decay

### Use of a baby bottle or sippy cup

- A naptime or bedtime bottle should only be filled with water.
- Juice and other sugary liquids - like chocolate milk, soda pop, Karo syrup, or sports drinks - should not be put in a baby's bottle. Encourage drinking from a cup by age 1.
- A sippy cup used between meals, at naptime, or at bedtime should only be filled with water.

### Between-meal snacks

- Sweet and starchy foods should be limited to mealtime.
- Sticky foods - like dried fruit, chewy candy, potato chips, and crackers - stick to teeth and increase acid attacks.
- Hard candy, breath mints, and cough drops also stay in the mouth a long time and cause repeated acid attacks. Use sugarless products if possible.
- Choose snacks that help prevent cavities, such as cheese, yogurt, and milk - or make other healthy choices like fresh fruits and vegetables.

### Soda pop and other beverages with sugar

- Limit soda pop and other sugary drinks - like sports drinks, fruit juice, and lemonade. Sipping on these drinks throughout the day can cause repeated acid attacks.
- Choose beverages like water, coffee, tea, and sugar-free noncarbonated drinks.
- Drink 6 to 8 glasses of fluoridated water every day.

### Daily home care

- Brush twice a day with fluoride toothpaste.
- Floss at least once a day, especially at bedtime.
- After brushing and flossing at night, do not eat or drink anything except water.