

THE BENEFITS OF FLUORIDE

NATURE'S CAVITY FIGHTER

Cavities used to be a fact of life. But during the past few decades, tooth decay has been dramatically reduced. One of the key reasons for this is fluoride.

WHAT IS FLUORIDE?

Fluoride is a mineral that occurs naturally in all water sources, including the ocean. Research has shown that fluoride not only prevents cavities in children and adults, it also helps repair the early stages of tooth decay even before the decay is visible.

During childhood, when teeth still are forming, fluoride works by making tooth enamel more resistant to the acid that causes tooth decay. For adolescents and adults, the benefits are just as great. Fluoride helps repair, or remineralize, areas where the acid attacks have already begun. For older adults, fluoride has been effective in reducing tooth decay along the gum line.



HOW IS IT USED?

Fluoride is obtained in two forms; topical (applied to the surface of the teeth) and systemic (ingested into the body). Topical fluorides may be found in toothpastes, mouth rinses and fluoride applied in the dental office. Systemic fluorides include fluoridated water and dietary fluoride supplements in the form of tablets, drops or lozenges. The maximum reduction in tooth decay is achieved when fluoride is available both topically and systemically.

Water fluoridation provides both topical and systemic benefits for preventing tooth decay. Community water fluoridation is an extremely effective and inexpensive means of obtaining the fluoride necessary for optimal preventions of tooth decay. Some communities have naturally fluoridated water supplies. If your community's water supply has low levels of fluoride, optimal levels can be achieved by simply adding additional fluoride. If you are unsure about the fluoride level in your community's water, ask your dentist and/or contact your state health department or water supplier.

Children who regularly drink bottled water, well water, or unfluoridated tap water may be missing the benefits of fluoride. Well water should be tested for fluoride content at least every two years as these levels can change. We do provide testing kits here for a small fee, or you may contact your local or state health department. While some bottled waters contain optimal levels of fluoride, the majority of bottled waters do not. Some companies produce bottled water with added fluoride. Check the label or contact the distributor for information. Well water must be tested to determine its fluoride content. For test, contact your local or state health department.

WHAT ABOUT HOME WATER TREATMENT SYSTEMS?

If you drink or cook with water processed by a home water treatment system (such as a reverse osmosis system or a distillation unit which removes fluoride from water) you could be missing the decay-preventing effects of fluoride. Check with the product's manufacturer to determine how the system might affect fluoride levels.

IS FLUORIDE SAFE?

More than 60 years of research and experience have shown that optimal levels of fluoridated water do not harm people or the environment. Fluoridation of community water supplies is supported by the American Dental Association, the U.S. Public Health Service, the American Medical Association and the World Health Organization. Anything in excessive amounts can be harmful to your health. In the proper dosages, fluoride is completely safe.

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OTHER SOURCES OF FLUORIDE

Not everyone lives in a community with a fluoridated water source. For those individuals, fluoride is available in other forms.

Dietary fluoride supplements (tablets, drops or lozenges) are available only by prescription and are intended for use by children ages six months to 16 years who live in non-fluoridated areas. For maximum effectiveness, fluoride supplements require long-term compliance on a daily basis.

Your dentist or child's physician can prescribe the appropriate dosage. The dosage is based on the natural fluoride concentration of the child's drinking water and the age of the child. If the fluoride level of the home's drinking water is unknown, the water should be tested for fluoride content before supplements are prescribed. We have fluoride test kits available here for a fee or you can contact your local or state health department for information on testing your water supply.

Fluoride toothpaste and mouth rinses with the American Dental Association (ADA) Seal of Acceptance help prevent tooth decay for both children and adults. When you shop for dental products, look for the ADA Seal—it's your assurance that a product has met ADA criteria for safety and effectiveness.

Parents and caregivers should closely monitor the use of all fluoride-containing dental products by children under the age of six. Ingestion of higher than recommended levels of fluoride by children has been associated with an increased risk of very mild dental fluorosis in developing, developing teeth.

For children under five years of age we recommended using only a smear of fluoridated toothpaste or about the size of a grain of rice. These children should be supervised while brushing and taught to spit out, rather than swallow the toothpaste. After they get the hang of spitting the toothpaste out, a small amount of toothpaste (pea sized) is recommended. The use of a fluoridated mouth rinse is not recommended until children can effectively spit it out.

*Some information obtained from the American Dental Association.

