

Dental Decay

Caries is a disease of the dental tissues. It causes cavitations-or cavities-in the hard tissue (enamel and dentin) of the tooth. It is caused by pathogenic bacteria that create a biofilm, or plaque, on your teeth, when they are exposed to simple carbohydrates such as sugar, and starch. In this biofilm, the bacteria create a very acidic environment, causing the mineral in your teeth (Calcium and Phosphate) to dissolve, thereby creating the cavity, which contains bacteria and decayed tooth structure. If the cavity is allowed to continue growing, it creates a hole deep enough to reach the softer tissue of the tooth, known as dentin. If the cavity reaches the dentin, no amount of brushing, flossing, or medications can reverse the cavity created. If the decayed tooth structure and the bacteria are not removed from the tooth, it will continue to grow, and eventually reach the tooth pulp, and lead to an infection that can cause a painful toothache, and necessitate a root canal or extraction of the tooth.

Before the cavity reaches the dentin, it is possible to arrest the cavity from continuing to grow. This can be done by doing the following:

- Keep the area free of plaque and food debris. Floss at least every day, and brush 2 or more times a day. Aim the bristles towards the area where the gums meet the tooth. That is a common area for plaque to build up, causing caries, and periodontitis.
- Use prescription fluoride toothpaste. Fluoridex or Prevident 5000 have high Fluoride content which helps to prevent bacterial growth, and remineralizes the enamel with Fluoride ions, which makes teeth more resistant to attack by bacteria. Instructions for use: Brush with pea sized amount twice a day. Spit but don't rinse, eat, or drink for at least 30 minutes. When brushing before bed, try not to drink or rinse before going to sleep. That way the fluoride can be working in your mouth fighting cavities all night.

Avoid sugary or acidic foods. If they are consumed, rinse your mouth out shortly after. Or better yet, brush and floss.