

Foods for Healthy Teeth and Gums

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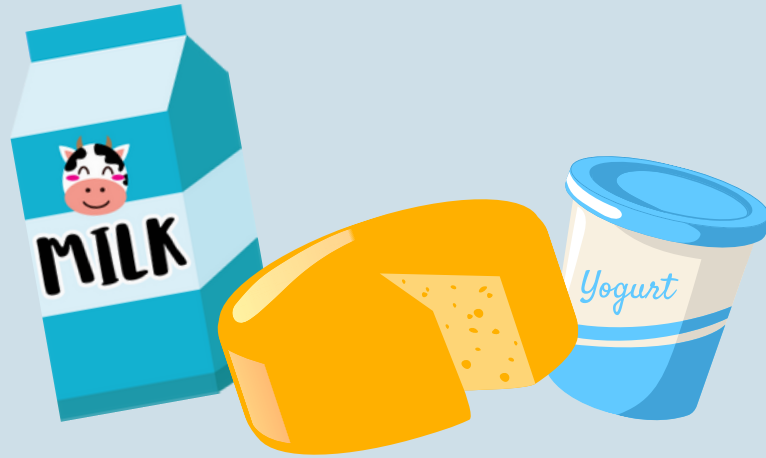
If you've had a less than ideal conversation at the dentist's office recently, just know **you're not alone**. For many college students, dental hygiene can take the back burner to more pressing matters (like studying or sleeping!) During my time as an undergrad student I wound up becoming so overwhelmed by deadlines, volunteering and going to work that I simply did not have the *energy* or *desire* to floss or brush my teeth as thoroughly as was necessary.

I was also eating so many convenience foods at the time that were damaging my oral health more than I thought. My dentist wound up telling me something that finally made it all come together; "**your teeth can sometimes act as a canary in a coal mine for your overall health.**"

With the help of a mental health professional on campus and my education in nutrition, I was able to move past the mindset barrier that was keeping me from optimal oral health and finally start eating towards a healthier smile. Read on to see what foods can benefit your oral health!



More Please!



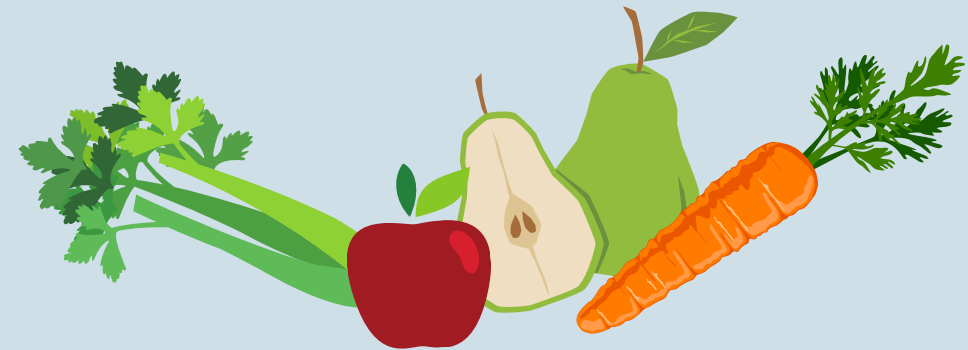
Milk, Cheese, and Yogurt

The high calcium content of these makes them beneficial for maintaining bone density and the phosphorous content helps control pH in the mouth to protect tooth enamel.

The probiotics in yogurt can help neutralize the bacteria that creates bad breath.

Fibrous Fruits and Vegetables

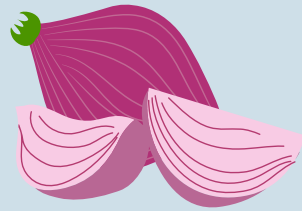
Think crunchy foods like carrots, celery, apple and pears here. Fiber acts as a natural scrub for your teeth by removing stubborn food residue from tooth surfaces. The act of chewing increases saliva which can wash away food particles *and* reduce the acidity in the mouth that can lead to cavities.



Nuts

Walnuts and almonds contain calcium and phosphorous making them a great snack choice for oral health!

Garlic & Onions?



Wild right?! Garlic contains **allicin** and fresh onion contains **quercetin**, both flavonoids with antimicrobial and antibacterial properties. Though, these two won't do your breath any favors.

Black or Green Tea

Tea contains polyphenols that can reduce inflammation and fight off cell damage. This is also beneficial in preventing cavities when made with fluoridated water.

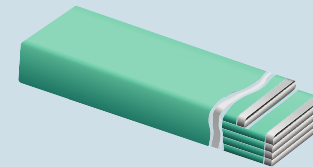


Water



Drink in between meals and as often as possible during. Water aids in rinsing the mouth of food particles that lead to gum disease and when fluoridated can help prevent cavities.

Sugar-free Gum

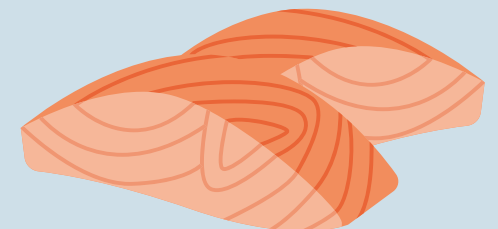
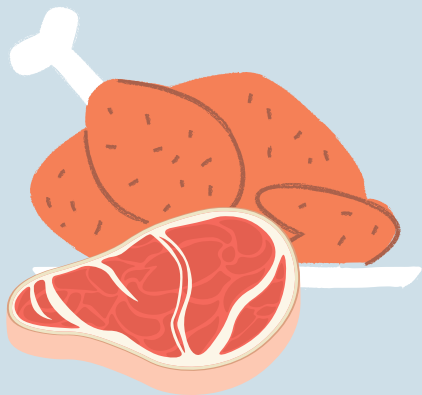


When you absolutely need to chew *something*, make it a sugar free gum.

The sweeteners in these are non-cavity forming, and the act of chewing will remove any stuck-on food from the teeth and increase saliva flow.

And no...you don't have to become vegetarian!

If meat is a part of your regular diet, rest assured that these will still be fine to consume. The act of chewing beef for instance can create more saliva to reduce pH levels in the mouth. Salmon and chicken are good animal based sources of phosphorous as well, which as we've learned can also aid in buffering acid in the mouth!



Limit These

Sticky, Chewy Candies

These are most likely to get trapped in between teeth for long periods of time and lead to cavities in the long term.

The high sugar content of these foods exacerbates the acidity in the mouth as well.



Starchy Snacks

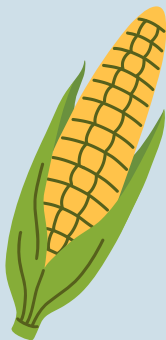
Corn or potato chips and soft breads can get trapped in the grooves of your teeth and lead to the formation of cavities.



Corn on the Cob

If you have braces consider avoiding this snack until your treatment is done. Corn **loves** to stick to teeth and is notoriously difficult to remove from brackets.

If you're brace free, make sure to floss and brush as the carbohydrates can lead to dental decay when left on tooth surfaces.



Soda or other Carbonated Drinks

These are high in sugar and often contain phosphoric and citric acids, all of which can lead to cavities and the destruction of tooth enamel.



Additional Resources

available on campus!

Don't forget that eating a balanced, healthful diet is just *one part* of maintaining a healthy mouth. Brushing at least twice a day and flossing are major aids in overall oral health.



Health Center at
Auraria

See healthcare providers to manage your overall health or meet with a Registered Dietitian who can help you create a healthy eating pattern.

Rowdy's Corner

Provides free snacks and food regardless of need!

MSU Denver
Counseling Center

Talk to someone if you feel that your current emotional status or lifestyle are contributing to poor oral or overall health.

About the Author

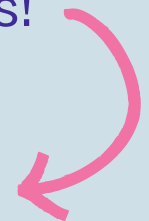
Karina received her bachelor's in nutrition at MSU, where she learned just how challenging being a busy, working, *nontraditional* student can be.

She will finish up her dietetic internship in May 2022 and plans to work as a dietitian gaining experience working with maternal and child health. She hopes to pursue a Masters in Public Health as her next academic adventure!

Follow my adventures in Dietetics!



@Karina_the_Intern



(@Karina_the_RDN if you catch this post after summer/fall 2022!)

