

Adult Tooth Decay

What Adults Should Know About Tooth Decay

First of all, cavities aren't just for kids. We all hate to hear that our dentist has found new cavities since our last visit. Even worse, some cavities create pain that we can do little to relieve. Cavities are areas of decay on teeth, and they can form on any surface of a tooth. To repair a cavity, the decay must be removed and replaced with a man-made substance. How can you deter decay to avoid negative reports from your dentist and nagging oral pain? First, you must understand what causes tooth decay.

The Cause

A healthy mouth contains natural, good bacteria that neutralize acids and help clean up food particles. This bacteria and your saliva also help strengthen areas of de-mineralization on teeth by restoring the minerals that protect teeth from decay.

Sometimes bad bacteria—plaque—can throw a healthy mouth's homeostasis into chaos. Made from mucus, saliva, decaying food, and bad bacteria, plaque is a sticky substance that can build up on your teeth. Harmful bacteria in plaque emit an acid that eats away tooth enamel to create cavities. This acid can eat into the tooth, through the enamel, through the dentin, to cause pain where nerves and blood vessels are vulnerable. Often a cavity that grows to affect the dentin must undergo a root canal or extraction. In short, tooth decay can kill teeth.

The Cure

To prevent tooth decay, see your dentist twice each year for a thorough cleaning and oral exam. At home, you should brush your teeth with a soft tooth brush after each meal and floss daily. Mouthwashes and fluoride rinses can help destroy harmful bacteria and re-mineralize teeth. Of course, staying away from foods high in sugars and starches will help since bad bacteria consider these two items a delicacy.

If you have small cavities, get them filled as soon as possible, before they grow and cause extensive damage. Professional fluoride treatments and dental sealants can also help deter tooth decay. Some patients have more problems with plaque than others. Our team will gladly help you understand the particularities of your mouth and recommend ways to prevent bacteria and tooth decay.