

Benefits Spotlight

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5 “healthy” food and drinks that could harm your oral health

When it comes to food and beverages that aren’t great for your teeth and mouth, the common cavity-causing culprits are candy and soda. But what if some seemingly healthy products are secretly harming your smile?

Although you don’t have to avoid these items entirely, it’s still important to understand how certain foods and drinks can affect your teeth and mouth. Here are five surprisingly “good-for-you” sips and snacks that have hidden oral health dangers, along with tips to reduce the impact on your teeth and mouth.

- **Dried fruit:** Dried fruit is packed with lots of good things for your overall health, such as vitamins, fiber and antioxidants. However, it also contains a high amount of naturally occurring sugars. These sugars can stick to your teeth and provide fuel for harmful bacteria that cause cavities.

Tips: Enjoy dried fruit in moderation. Also, pair your dried fruit snack with water or sugar-free gum to produce saliva, which helps wash away sugars that cling to teeth.

- **Citrus fruits:** Fresh fruit is a part of any healthy diet, and citrus fruits like oranges, grapefruits and lemons are well known for their high immunity-boosting vitamin C content. But these fruits also contain high citric acid content that can harm your oral health by eroding your tooth enamel (the outer white layer of your teeth). When your enamel wears down, you’re more likely to develop cavities and painful tooth sensitivity.

Tips: Eat citrus fruits in moderation and rinse your mouth with water after consuming them to rinse away leftover acid. A great way to enjoy citrus with less harm to your teeth is by drinking water with fresh citrus slices, which lowers the acidity level while still delivering a vitamin boost. Another important note: Do not brush your teeth immediately after consuming acidic foods and drinks. Wait at least 30 minutes, as brushing too soon can worsen the damage acid may cause on your tooth enamel. Instead of immediately brushing, rinse with water to freshen and clean your mouth.

- *Granola and trail mix:* Granola and trail mix can be a well-balanced snack combining fruit and nuts that pack protein and vitamins, but many of the store-bought, pre-packaged varieties contain a lot of added sugar. Granola clusters can also be tough on your teeth, even causing tooth damage.

Tips: When buying granola, make sure to read the ingredients list and choose granola with lower added sugar. The healthiest granola is homemade, using nuts, seeds and a sprinkle of dried fruit. Making granola yourself gives you control over the sugar content. Plus, homemade granola is fresher, which helps ensure that the clusters aren't too stale and hard on your teeth.

- *Juice and smoothies:* Many people choose fresh juices and smoothies because they pack a lot of nutrients into a single drink. But depending on the variety you choose, juices and smoothies can contain a lot of hidden sugars and acids that are harmful for teeth.

Tips: Like granola, smoothies and juices are healthiest when they are homemade because you can control the sweetness and acidity. Choose whole frozen fruits and vegetables that don't contain added sweetener, and use citrus fruits in moderation. Another smart tip is to use a straw when consuming these drinks, as a straw will help move the beverage away from your teeth better than drinking it straight from a cup.

- *Sports drinks:* Sports drinks often boast a lot of healthful words like “electrolytes” and “hydration,” but they often contain a lot of sugar and acid, which work together to raise your risk of cavities.

Tips: Check the labels on sports drinks before buying, as many varieties contain lower added sugar. Drinking through a straw can limit how much sugar and acid linger on your teeth. And remember: Plain, still water is the best option to hydrate your body, even when doing heavy physical activity. Instead of drinking two sports drinks, swap one with a bottle of water. It's a great way to enjoy sports drinks moderately and achieve healthy hydration.

Moderation (not elimination) helps maintain a healthy smile

While these foods have numerous health benefits, it's important to know how they affect your oral health. The good news is you don't have to give them up for the sake of your teeth and mouth — simply rinsing your mouth with water, using a straw and keeping good oral hygiene through regular brushing and flossing are great ways to enjoy these healthy foods without compromising your dental health.

SOURCES:

[Oral Health Foundation](#)

[American Dental Association Mouth Healthy](#)

[Children's Dental Health](#)

Beyond brushing: Why cleaning your tongue matters

You might focus a lot on your teeth and gums to care for your oral health — but what about your tongue? Your tongue is an important part of your mouth, and giving it some daily attention as part of your regular dental hygiene routine is a good idea.

Benefits to daily tongue cleaning

Your tongue has more of an impact on your oral health than you might think. Cleaning your tongue each day offers several benefits, including:

- *Fresh breath:* The tongue's textured surface can trap bacteria within its tiny bumps. This bacteria can cause bad breath, so regularly cleaning your tongue helps remove these bacteria and combat bad breath.
- *Reduced risk of cavities and gum disease:* The bacteria on your tongue can lead to cavities and gum disease. Brushing and flossing remove germs on your teeth and gums, but cleaning your tongue helps lower the overall bacterial load in your mouth, promoting better oral health.
- *Sharpened sense of taste:* Cleaning your tongue may actually improve your sense of taste by removing extra layers of bacteria that can dull flavors on your tongue.

How to clean your tongue: Tools and techniques

The two best tools to clean your tongue are a tongue scraper or a toothbrush.

A tongue scraper is the best option to clean your tongue, as it's specially designed to remove germs from the tongue's bumpy surface. You can find tongue scrapers at most drugstores, and it's important to select plastic, rounded versions, which are gentlest on your tongue.

If you don't have a tongue scraper, a soft-bristled toothbrush can help clean your tongue.

Tongue cleaning is simple and can easily be incorporated into your regular at-home dental care routine. Here's a step-by-step breakdown:

1. After brushing your teeth, stick out your tongue as far as it will comfortably go.
2. Gently scrape your tongue with a tongue scraper or brush with your toothbrush. Start at the back of your tongue and gently scrape or brush forward in long strokes.
3. Rinse your tongue scraper or toothbrush after each scrape/brush stroke.
4. Repeat steps 2 and 3 a few times.
5. Finish by rinsing your mouth with water.

Tongue cleaning might feel a bit strange at first, but it should never be painful. If you regularly experience pain or bleeding when you clean your tongue, contact your dentist to help solve the underlying problem.

Consider cleaning your tongue for optimal oral health

Adding another step to your dental care routine can be tough, but tongue cleaning is a simple addition that can make a big difference by promoting fresher breath, a heightened sense of taste and better overall oral health.