



# DENTAL HEALTH

**As children enter their teenage years, nutrition plays an important role in maintaining strong teeth throughout adulthood. Everything that is consumed can influence dental health, particularly in regards to limiting the development of tooth decay at an early age. In this fact sheet, we explore positive steps that can be used to promote dental and gum health during adolescence.**

## DRINK ENOUGH WATER

Children aged 12 and above should aim to have between 6-8 cups of water per day. Ideally, water should be chosen as the main source of hydration in order to get the added benefit from fluoride. Additionally, drink water regularly throughout the day can also help in neutralising acid buildup, further helping to prevent decay.

## LIMIT REFINED SUGARS

Sugar has a direct connection with tooth decay. Sugar in food leads to the buildup of plaque on teeth which can dissolve enamel and lead to cavities. Some tips to help reduce the risk of tooth decay from added sugar include:

- Cut back on all sugary drinks. This includes soft drink, juice, cordial, sports drinks and energy drinks. When possible, use a straw so that your teeth are less exposed to sugar and acid.
- Check the nutrition label on processed foods for added sugars. Ideally choose foods which contain **less than 10g per 100g of sugar**.
- When having a multivitamin choose capsules/tablets over gummies.
- Avoid chewing gum that contains sugar.
- Limit the amount sticky sugary foods which hold sugar on the teeth for longer. This includes dried fruit and toffee.

- Avoid adding honey or sugar onto cereals.

In Australia, there is currently no recommended INCLUDE DAIRY FOR CALCIUM daily sugar limit, however the WHO suggests limiting sugar intake to less than 5% of total energy in order to maintain dental health. This is equivalent to approximately **6 teaspoons of sugar** for adolescents.

The table below illustrates the amount of sugar in common beverages and snacks.

|   | Food/Drink                  | Teaspoons (tsp) |
|---|-----------------------------|-----------------|
|  | Flavoured milk (300ml)      | 7tsp            |
|  | Chocolate                   | 6tsp            |
|  | Soft drink (1 can or 375ml) | 10tsp           |
|  | Sports drink (600ml)        | 9tsp            |
|  | Blueberry muffin            | 8tsp            |
|  | Orange juice (250ml)        | 6tsp            |
|  | Cake (1 slice)              | 5tsp            |
|  | Tim Tam                     | 2tsp            |

## INCLUDE DAIRY FOR CALCIUM

Approximately 99% of the body's calcium is held in both the teeth and bones. Therefore, it is essential that adolescents are meeting their daily calcium needs in order to promote dental health.

Adolescents require **1300mg of calcium per day**. In terms of dairy, this is equivalent to 3½ serves.

One serve of dairy is equal to one cup of milk, two slices of cheese or one tub of yoghurt.

Whilst dairy is one of the main sources of calcium, a number of other dairy free foods also contain high levels of calcium. These include tofu, fortified soy milk, canned salmon (with bones), brazil nuts and fortified cereals such as 'Uncle Toby's Cereal Plus Calcium'.

Tips to help maximise calcium intake include, having cereal for breakfast made with milk, serving yoghurt with fruit, including a slice of cheese on sandwiches and serving desserts with either yoghurt or custard.

Additionally, vitamin D is an essential component of calcium absorption. Spending **20-30 minutes per day in the sunlight** can help to meet vitamin D goals and therefore promote dental health. Given that sunscreen stops the absorption of vitamin D, aim to spend time in the sun during the early morning or late afternoon when sun is not at its strongest to protect against UV damage.