

FLUORIDE

Tooth decay occurs when plaque—a sticky substance of bacteria, mucus and particles that builds up on your teeth, causing gum disease—on your teeth and gums produces acids that attack your tooth enamel, which is composed mostly of minerals. This “demineralization” of your tooth creates a weak spot that will eventually become a cavity. Fluoride helps prevent tooth decay by strengthening weak areas and repairing early stages of tooth decay. Fluoride reduces the breakdown of enamel and promotes the “remineralization” process. These new enamel crystals are harder and more resistant to acid.

Fluoride is not just for children and adolescents; adults also gain significant benefits. Fluoride is widely available through many different methods. Topical fluorides include dental products such as toothpastes and mouthwashes, and fluoride treatments applied by your dentist. Fluoride may also be taken internally; for example, fluoridated water and fluoride supplements.

Research shows that the best results are obtained when fluoride is used both topically and internally.

If you aren’t getting enough fluoride through regular channels (for example, if your water doesn’t contain fluoride), your dentist may recommend other options such as high-concentration gels. For children who live in non-fluoridated areas, prescription dietary supplements are available. However, children under age 6 should be supervised when they brush their teeth, so

that they don’t use too much fluoride toothpaste or swallow it. Ask your dentist to demonstrate the correct amount and type of toothpaste for your child.

Although fluoride is essential, it’s not enough, on its own, to prevent tooth decay. You still need to maintain your other cavity-fighting measures, such as limiting sweets, daily brushing and flossing, and regular dental exams. Talk to your dentist about the best way for you to include fluoride in your dental routine.

