



Your Teeth and Fluoride

Member Resources – Oral Health

This important mineral protects your teeth.

How Fluoride Helps Your Teeth

No matter your age, fluoride helps your teeth. It helps harden enamel on baby and adult teeth, before and after they have emerged. With your saliva, it balances the other minerals in your mouth and teeth.

There are two ways to feed your teeth the right amount of fluoride.

1. Drink fluoridated water.
2. Brush with a fluoride toothpaste.

How Much Is Enough?

Depending on your oral health, you may need extra fluoride. Your dentist can apply a topical treatment. Or you can use a special rinse or gel at home. (Ask your dentist about insurance coverage.) Healthy oral habits and a good diet should ensure you're getting the right amount. Stains, pitting, or white specks on teeth can indicate too much. The payoff? A reduction in cavities and strong, healthy teeth!

Fluoride DOs and DON'Ts³

- **DO** brush twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste.
- **DO** use rice grain-sized amount of toothpaste for children under 3.
- **DO** eat food cooked in water and fish with their bones (like sardines).
- **DO** floss at least once a day.
- **DON'T** replace tap water with bottled water whenever possible.
- **DON'T** let young children swallow toothpaste.
- **DON'T** give fluoride supplements to children.

Fluoride: A Tooth Story

Fluoride is a mineral that is found in all bodies of water. But no one knew the role it played in oral health until the 1930s. The fluoride story begins in Colorado Springs in 1901. Dentists noticed people in the town, children included, had brown spots on their teeth. But these same people had very little tooth decay.

One dentist was getting close to the discovery, linking it somehow to the town's water supply. He died before research uncovered too much fluoride in the town's water. Soon, they found the magic amount that would promise to keep teeth stain- and decay-free.²

Grand Rapids, MI, had the world's first fluoridated water. Proof of its success came in just 11 years, when cavities in children dropped by over 60 percent.²

1 <https://www.colgate.com/en-us/oral-health/basics/fluoride/what-is-fluoride>, 2019, accessed November 2019.

2 https://www.nidcr.nih.gov/health-info/fluoride/the-story-of-fluoridation?_ga=2.231751711.1643233657.1573053296-1835391097.1572628828, July 2018.

3 <https://www.healthline.com/health/dental-and-oral-health/fluoride-treatment#recommendations>, accessed November 2019.

Material discussed is meant for general informational purposes only and is not to be construed as medical advice. Although the information has been gathered from sources believed to be reliable, please note that individual situations can vary. You should always consult a licensed professional when making decisions concerning oral health care.