

Eat Your Way to Healthier, Whiter Teeth

To have a beautiful smile brush, floss...and eat – yes, eating is a vital part of maintaining a healthy, glowing smile. Eating well, that is. Certain foods of course are good for your overall health, and thus are inevitably good for your teeth and gums. Among these are foods that directly act to clean your teeth, stimulate your gums, fight bacteria, freshen your breath and even whiten your teeth, and do it naturally.

It will be no surprise that many fruits and vegetables rank high in promoting health – both dental and general. Most are rich in vitamins, minerals and antioxidants, and many have antibacterial and cleansing properties as well. Apples, celery and carrots are some of the best foods to munch on after a meal when you might not be able to brush. Their fibers act as floss and clean the surfaces of teeth, and the act of chewing them stimulates the gums. They reduce cavity causing bacteria and their high moisture content rinses away food particles and prevents decay-causing dry mouth. Broccoli, cauliflower and cucumbers are also natural cleansers of teeth.

Leafy green and cruciferous vegetables are excellent sources of vitamins A and C, and phosphorous, calcium and magnesium – all essential for strong and healthy teeth. These vegetables include spinach, cabbage, lettuce, asparagus, cauliflower, broccoli, Brussels sprouts and kale. Additionally, spinach, broccoli and lettuce work to create a film over teeth that act as a plaque barrier and actually can prevent staining.

Many fruits are excellent for oral health. Most are rich in vitamin C and other nutrients. They stimulate the gums and can reduce bacteria in the mouth. Citrus fruits, pineapples and tomatoes are especially high in vitamin C. Strawberries act directly to whiten and polish teeth. Their gentle cleaning and bleaching properties can help remove coffee and tea stains and are a good natural alternative to harsh whitening gels. A paste can even be made of crushed strawberries and used to brush the teeth. (It is recommended to rinse thoroughly after such usage as strawberries are mildly acidic and can damage tooth enamel if left on too long.) Oranges, like strawberries, are great tooth whiteners: after brushing, rub the skin of an orange rind on your teeth and admire the results!

Herbs can act as natural breath fresheners: chewing on herbs like parsley, cilantro and mint cleans teeth naturally, reduces bacteria and offers the benefit of pleasant breath. It should be noted that the maximum benefits for your teeth from herbs and most fruits and vegetables result when they are chewed and eaten in an uncooked state, and have all the undiminished benefits of their natural fibrous crunchiness and nutritional load.

Other foods that pack great benefits for your teeth:

Cheese can also aid in preventing discoloration of the teeth.

Onions, surprisingly enough, have strong antibacterial properties to benefit the teeth, although they don't benefit the breath.

Shitake mushrooms are antibacterial and work to prevent plaque buildup which can lead to periodontal disease and cavities.

Meat, fish, eggs and milk are sources of phosphorous, vitamin A and D and calcium – all good for healthy tooth enamel.

Bananas are high in magnesium – which is good for teeth.

Whole grains and spinach are also good sources of magnesium.