

Maybe I should pile on a little more guilt for the holiday eating season. Think about your teeth. Brush two minutes twice a day, floss daily, *avoid* sweets. If you do eat sweets, it's a good habit to rinse with water to reduce the carbohydrates you are feeding the bacteria.

Prevention is best, but can demineralization (cavities) be reversed? Remineralization and demineralization *have* a significant impact on the strength and hardness of dental enamel. Remineralization and demineralization are processes that occur on the tooth surface. Since there is no connection between the bloodstream and tooth enamel, mineral supplements *have* no impact on the remineralization process. The reverse is also true.

Events that draw minerals out of the blood, such as pregnancy or a broken bone healing, do not extract minerals from the teeth. Remineralization is a complex process, but in order for it to occur sufficient minerals must be present in the saliva. Food is the principal source of minerals for the teeth, therefore an adequate diet and sufficient time spent chewing (this transfers minerals to the saliva) is *vital*.

Traditionally, we *have* prescribed fluoride treatments (home or office) for preventing or reversing cavities. As the remineralization takes place, the fluoride is incorporated into the enamel and makes it harder and more resistant to decay.

Recently, a compound called amorphous calcium phosphate" (ACP) and several similar compounds *have* been found to reverse the *cavity* process. These can be found in several new toothpastes and Trident gum. There is also evidence that Xylitol in chewing gum also helps reverse the decay process. I discussed the American Dental Association endorsement in a previous column.

Some moms were incredulous that I endorse gum chewing. As long as it is sugarless, it may *have* some benefit. It's really the gum spitting that is bad. For all of the grinchies out there:

HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

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