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## TOOTH DECAY AND FLOURIDE

It has been estimated that 90% of people in the United States have at least one cavity, and that 75% of people had their first cavity by the age of five. Tooth decay is a common health problem, second in prevalence only to the common cold. Nevertheless, there are many things parents can do to minimize the risk to their children.

Tooth decay, also known as dental cavities or dental caries, is the destruction of the outer surface (enamel) of a tooth. While tooth enamel is the hardest substance in the body, it is porous. Plaque on the surface of your child's teeth can produce acids that seep into the pores of the enamel and break down its internal structure. This process, is called demineralization, can create a weak spot on the surface of the tooth that may become a cavity if left untreated.

### Fluoride Helps Prevent Decay

Fluoride is a natural substance that slows the destruction of enamel and helps to repair minor tooth decay damage by remineralizing tooth structure. Fluoride occurs naturally in water and in many different foods, as well in dental products such as toothpaste, mouth rinses, gel, varnishes, and vitamins.

Children who are at the highest risk for dental decay benefit the most from fluoride. Fluoride is effective in preventing tooth decay when combined with a healthy diet, good oral hygiene, and regular dental check-ups.

### Does My Child Need Fluoride Supplementation?

Children between the ages of six months and sixteen years may require fluoride supplements. Your pediatric dentist will help determine the correct amount of fluoride for your child. A pediatric dentist considers many risk factors (such as the child's age, quality of her enamel, oral hygiene, history of dental decay, diet, habits, orthodontic appliances, and certain medical conditions) before recommending a fluoride supplement. Please follow your dental specialist's instructions closely because too much fluoride or too little fluoride can affect the appearance of your child's teeth.

### Remember The Cavity Fighters

Fluoride treatment and supplementation is helpful when combined with the following:

- Daily brushing and flossing, especially after eating
- Sugar-free foods and drinks
- Regular dental visits
- Sealants placed on teeth

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