

Cavities are preventable and caused by certain types of bacteria (germs) that live in your mouth. Bacteria grow in the film on your teeth called plaque. The bacteria feed on what you eat, especially sugars (including fruit sugars) and cooked starch (bread, potatoes, rice, pasta, etc.). About 5 minutes after you eat, or drink, the bacteria begin making acid as they digest your food. This acid can break down the tooth's outer surface and dissolve valuable minerals that protect your teeth. The result is cavities.

You are not born with the bacteria that cause cavities. These bacteria are usually transferred to you at a young age by your primary care taker, most often your mother. To reduce the chances of passing the bacteria to your children, avoid sharing utensils, straws or other items that may have saliva on them.

## How to Prevent Decay

- Brush your teeth twice a day with fluoride toothpaste
- Clean between teeth daily with floss or other home care device designed to clean between teeth
- Eat a balanced diet and limit sugary food and drinks
- Visit your CDA member dentist regularly for professional cleanings and exams
- Ask your dentist about:
  - **dental sealants**, a protective plastic coating that can be applied to the chewing surfaces of the back teeth where decay often starts
  - **xylitol** gum and mints
  - **fluoride** treatments including varnish

## Dental Decay Process

