

Fluoride and Tooth Decay

Tooth enamel is hard. It consists of many closely-packed rods made of minerals. When you eat, acid forms on the outside of the tooth and seeps into the enamel's rods. This **demineralization** process can produce a **weak spot** in the tooth's surface. If unchecked, the enamel can decay and create a cavity.

Fluoride helps prevent tooth decay by slowing the breakdown of enamel and speeding up the natural **remineralization** process. These microscopic views of the tooth's chewing surface show how fluoride works:



Healthy tooth enamel rods before acid's onslaught.

Enamel rods demineralized, or broken down, by acid



Enamel rods remineralized or rebuilt, by fluoride and the minerals in saliva.

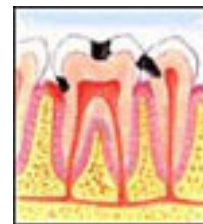
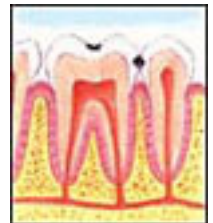


Common sources of fluoride are fluoridated drinking water, toothpaste and mouth rinse. Inform your dentist if your drinking water is not fluoridated. High concentration fluoride gels, mouth rinses, drops and tablets may be recommended by your dentist.

Your dentist may recommend at home fluoride treatments to reverse the **decay process**. If the weak spot is left unchecked, a **cavity** may form, necessitating a filling. If decay is allowed to spread, it may penetrate the root and enter the pulp (nerve) chamber, causing an **abscess** and requiring root canal treatment.

PROGRESSION OF TOOTH DECAY

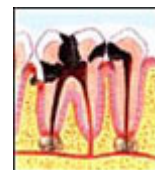
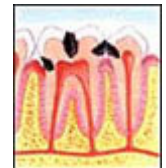
Tooth decay often begins on biting surfaces, between the teeth, and on exposed roots.



Untreated, the cavity becomes larger.



Decay spreads beneath the enamel and can destroy the tooth structure



Decay enters and infects the pulp and an abscess may occur.

Use of fluoridated toothpaste can help prevent tooth decay at its early stage.

Be sure to follow the special home care instructions provided by your dental professional.

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