

The Truth about Candy Is...

Everyone loves a sweet treat, but too many of us feel guilt, instead of enjoyment, when we indulge. The Sweet Truth is, there are no "bad" foods, just poorly planned diets. When you are eating well-balanced meals and getting plenty of exercise, you can include some of your favorite treats in your daily diet.

Sweet Surprise

This may come as a surprise to health-conscious Americans who aren't sure of the exact nutrient content of candy. Some people believe candy is much higher in fat, cholesterol and caffeine than it actually is. For this reason, many of us may be needlessly denying ourselves foods we really enjoy.

If You Love Sweets

If you love sweets, keep this in mind: The number one goal for good nutrition is to eat a variety of foods each day to supply your body with the different nutrients it needs. You also need to control how much you eat to achieve a healthy balance in your diet and your weight. If you practice these nutrition guidelines and exercise regularly, there should be room for candy in your diet.

Guess What?

Candy does not contribute a large percentage of the fat and sugar in the American diet.

In fact, less than two percent of the fat and ten percent of the sugar in our diets are supplied by candy. Most of the fat actually comes from the high-fat animal products we eat. The main sources of sugar in America's diets are sugary beverages, baked goods and frozen desserts.

Not all foods high in saturated fats raise cholesterol levels.

Contrary to popular belief, not all types of saturated fats raise blood cholesterol levels. Stearic acid, the primary saturated fatty acid found in chocolate, has been shown to have a neutral effect on blood cholesterol levels.

A solid milk chocolate bar contains about the same amount of caffeine as a cup of decaffeinated coffee.

A 1.4 ounce piece of milk chocolate contains about the same amount of caffeine as a cup of decaffeinated coffee.

There is an average of 6 mg. of caffeine in both an ounce of milk chocolate and a cup of decaf, while a cup of regular coffee contains between 65 and 150 mg. of caffeine.

The sugar in candy does not cause hyperactivity in children.

Sugar does not cause hyperactivity in children, despite widespread belief to the contrary. Recent studies conducted at Vanderbilt University and the University of Iowa College of Medicine found no evidence that sugar has an adverse effect on children's behavior.

Candies like jelly beans, gum drops and

Candy No Worse Than Pretzels When it Comes to Causing Cavities

Dentists Say All Fermentable Carbs Can Lead to Acid Attack on Tooth Enamel -- Regular Brushing and Flossing Are the Only Sure-Fire Methods for Keeping Cavities Away

The latest dental advice may make moms breathe a little more easily and kids grin--candy is not as bad for your teeth as once thought by many people. In fact, when it comes to causing cavities, a chocolate bar or jawbreaker is not much different than a slice of bread, according to dental experts.

The fact is, all foods that contains fermentable carbohydrates, whether sugar or starch, can start an acid attack on tooth enamel that leads to cavities, according to Rhea Haugseth, D.D.S., a pediatric dentist in Marietta, GA. Foods ranging from pretzels to spaghetti to candy fit into this broad category.

"Foods one might never have associated with the potential for causing tooth decay are on this list," she advised.

Included on this list are foods such as crackers, potato chips, bread and even unsweetened breakfast cereals, all of which contain types of starch that appear to stick to teeth longer than sugars and some other starches. Dried fruits, such as raisins, also stick to teeth longer, prolonging an acid attack. Even sipping a glass of orange juice for an hour may result in prolonged contact between the citric acid and the teeth, attacking tooth enamel.

Other dental experts agree. "If you eat fermentable carbohydrates, you are at risk for developing dental cavities. That is why brushing, flossing and regular check-ups are so important," explains Riva Touger-Decker, Ph.D., R.D., FADA, an assistant professor at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey.

Research shows that some confectionery, such as chocolate, may have relatively little impact when it comes to causing dental caries (commonly called cavities). According to Shelby Kashket, Ph.D., at the Forsyth Dental Center in Boston, chocolate tends to clear the mouth quickly, limiting the time it is in contact with the teeth.

Other research notes that chocolate contains tannins, substances that seem to prevent cavity-causing bacteria from sticking to the teeth and gums, perhaps even helping to suppress caries development.

Dental experts agree that how often we eat and how long a food remains in contact with the teeth are the key factors when it comes to tooth decay. "Every time a starchy or sugary food comes in contact with the teeth, an acid attack on tooth enamel begins, sometimes lasting more than an hour," said Kashket.

Whether a child eats a slice of birthday cake or simply licks a fingerful of icing, an acid attack will occur. Starchy snacks like chips, pretzels and cereal tend to cause longer-lasting acid attacks than sugary foods like a chocolate bar or gum drops, because the latter dissolves more quickly in the mouth, according to Touger-Decker.

So what is the best advise when it comes to preventing cavities? The American Academy of Pediatric Dentists offers several tips.

- When it comes to snacking, limit snack times to no more than four a day.
- Brush teeth at least twice a day, after breakfast and dinner.
- If your child can't brush after a sweet or starchy snack, swishing water in the mouth to rinse the teeth can help.
- Eat a nutritionally balanced diet and visit your dentist regularly.

"There are no really good foods or bad foods," adds Touger-Dekcer. "According to the American Dietetic Association, eaten in moderation, candy can certainly fit any diet or lifestyle. What's more important is that kids consume an overall nutritionally balanced diet and brush and floss their teeth at least twice a day."