



# TOOTH DECAY

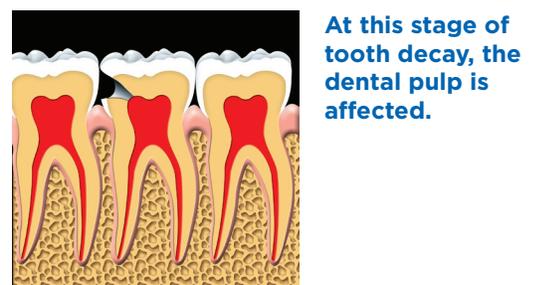
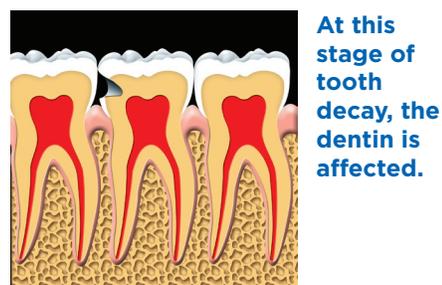
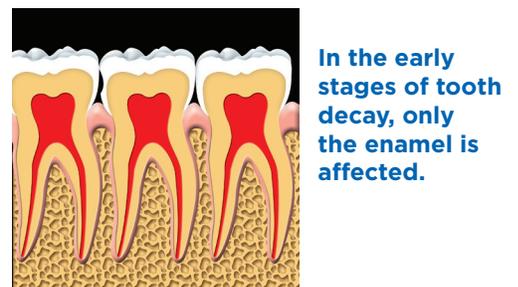
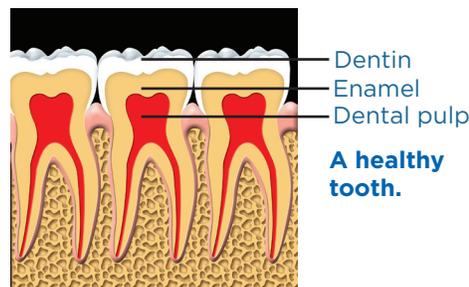
Tooth decay, also known as dental caries, is a disease that starts just below the surface of the tooth. If left untreated, it can damage the structure of the tooth and eventually lead to a cavity in the tooth. A common treatment for a cavity is a dental filling.

## PREVENTING TOOTH DECAY

In most cases, tooth decay can be prevented and even turned around in its early stages with good oral hygiene, a well-balanced diet and regular dental visits. When you go for a dental exam, one of the things your dentist looks for is tooth decay.

Using a dental instrument, your dentist looks in the pits and grooves and feels for soft areas on your teeth. Sometimes the disease is visible to your dentist, but often X-rays are needed to see inside your teeth for signs of tooth decay. If signs of tooth decay are found, it is important to stop it from spreading. Depending on the stage of the disease, your dentist may recommend fluoride applications. As well, your dentist may recommend changes to your oral hygiene routine or your diet.

With regular dental exams, your dentist will find most cavities in their early stages. Treating a cavity in its early stage will stop decay from spreading to the point where there is little structure left to your tooth. If you have a small cavity, your dentist may keep an eye on it or fill it right away with a dental filling. Large cavities, if not treated, will cause pain, eventually leading to a possible root canal treatment or extraction.



## HOW CAVITIES FORM

Cavities begin with plaque. Plaque is an invisible film containing bacteria that forms on your teeth every day. These bacteria are quite normal and mostly harmless. They become a problem when the plaque is not cleaned from your teeth by brushing and flossing and are allowed to build up.

A mild acid is produced when sugars in the food you eat mix with the bacteria in the plaque. This acid slowly eats away at the enamel (hard outer layer of your tooth). Over time, the enamel gets soft and a cavity forms.

## KINDS OF CAVITIES

Although cavities are more common during childhood, adults can get cavities too. There are 3 types of cavities:

- **Coronal cavities:** This type of cavity forms on the biting surface of your tooth, between your teeth or along your gum line. It is the most common type of cavity.
- **Root cavities:** This type of cavity forms on the roots of the teeth. As we grow older, our gums recede or pull away from our teeth. Years of not brushing your teeth properly may also cause your gums to recede. When your gums pull away from your teeth, the roots of the teeth are exposed. Roots do not have enamel to protect them, so they are more likely to get cavities.
- **Recurrent cavities:** This type of cavity forms around an existing filling. Fillings are not as smooth as natural teeth, so tiny bits of food and bacteria can get caught at the edge of a filling. This can cause a cavity to form again on the tooth around the filling. If a filling breaks, the part of the tooth that is no longer covered is more likely to get a cavity.

Talk to your dentist about the best ways to prevent and treat tooth decay.

