

Tooth Decay



What Is Tooth Decay?



Tooth decay happens when you have an infection of your teeth.



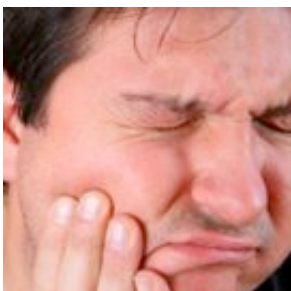
When you eat food and drink, it is broken down into acid.

This acid helps to make plaque (a sticky substance).

This plaque breaks down the surface of your tooth.



If it is not treated, plaque can destroy the outside of the tooth, exposing (showing) the nerves inside.



This will give you a bad toothache.



Do Lots of People Have Tooth Decay?



Tooth decay is one of the most common health problems in the UK.



Over half of adults in the UK have one or more decayed or damaged teeth.



Over half (nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ of) children aged 8 to 15 years have some tooth decay in their teeth.



We make every effort to make sure the information is correct (right).

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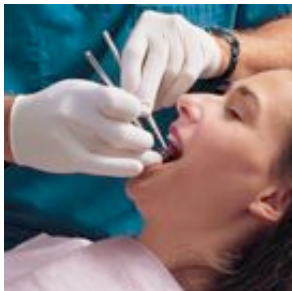
How To Avoid Tooth Decay



- Do not eat so much sugar and starchy foods and drinks (for example chocolate and pasta and bread)



- Brush your teeth 2 times a day with fluoride toothpaste



- Go for regular check ups at the dentist



There are ways that your dentist can repair your teeth.

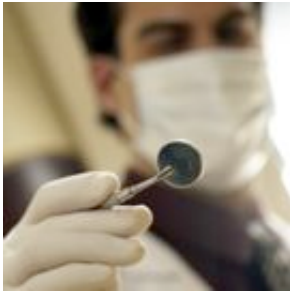
Your dentist can use crowns (it covers the tooth) and fillings on teeth.



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Check-ups and Symptoms



The Importance of Regular Dental Checks



Tooth decay does not give you any symptoms until it has reached a serious stage.



Regular check-ups can find out if you have tooth decay much earlier on.



Adults over 18 should have a check-up every 2 years (at least).



Children (up to 18) should have a check-up every year (at least).



However, your dentist may suggest you have check ups more often if your teeth need to be looked after carefully.



Symptoms of Advanced (Bad) Tooth Decay:



- Toothache



- Tooth sensitivity - you may be in pain when eating or drinking something hot, cold or sweet; or when you breathe in cold air



- Grey, brown or black spots that appear on your teeth



- Bad breath



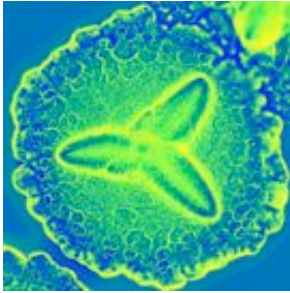
- A horrid taste in your mouth



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How Tooth Decay Happens



The bacteria in your mouth are usually safe.



If you eat or drink foods that are high in sugar and carbohydrates the bacteria will turn this into acid.



Acid then makes plaque which covers the surface of your teeth in a thin film.



A tooth is made up of three parts:



- **The enamel** - which is the hard outer coating of a tooth



- **The dentine** - which is a softer, bone-like material that supports the enamel



- **The pulp** - this is the centre of the tooth; the pulp is made up of soft tissue and contains nerves and blood vessels



The plaque will first start to break down the enamel (the outer layer).

This takes about 2 years.



Then the plaque makes a small hole in the enamel. This is called a cavity.



Once this hole has been made, the plaque and bacteria can then reach the dentin (the softer bone-like material).



Then the plaque and bacteria quickly get into the middle of the tooth (the pulp).



The nerves will then become exposed, making your tooth very painful, because the nerves are the parts that give you feeling.



Tooth decay usually happens in the teeth in the back of the mouth.



These are large flat teeth that you use to chew food.



It is easy for food to get stuck on these teeth.



They are also more difficult to clean properly.



Some people are more likely to have tooth decay



Diet



If you eat foods and drinks that are sugary or have a lot of carbohydrates (crisps, white bread, biscuits), you are more likely to get tooth decay.



If you often have snacks, the plaque has more time to attack your teeth.



Poor oral (mouth) hygiene



If you do not regularly brush your teeth, you are more likely to get tooth decay.



You should brush your teeth 2 times a day – after you have eaten.

If you can do this 3 times a day that is even better.



Smoking



Smokers are much more likely to get tooth decay.



The smoke stops saliva (the wetness in your mouth) being made.



It is saliva that helps to keep your mouth clean.



If you have children, your smoking will also make them more likely to have tooth decay.



Dry Mouth



People who have less saliva in their mouth are more likely to have tooth decay.



Some medicines can stop you making so much saliva, such as:



- Some anti-depressant medicines



- Anti-histamines (used in the treatment of allergies)



- Some anti-epileptic medicines



- Some anti-psychotic medicines



- Beta-Blocker medicines (used to treat a number of heart conditions)



- Radiotherapy (used to treat some types of cancer) can also often lower the levels of saliva in your mouth



- If you are taking such a medicine or treatment, you should drink lots of water



- You should also brush your teeth carefully and regularly



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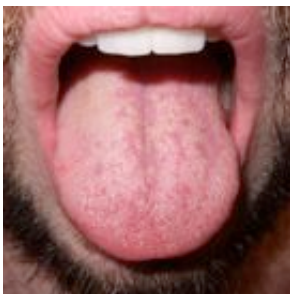
Eating Disorders



You are more likely to have tooth decay if you have anorexia or bulimia (eating disorders that are explained below).



Anorexia is when someone eats very little because they worry about getting fat.



Anorexia can stop you making so much saliva, which means you are more likely to have tooth decay.



Bulimia is when someone eats lots, and then makes themselves sick as they worry about getting fat.



Being sick puts stomach acids in your mouth which then attack the teeth.



Gastro-Oesophageal Reflux Disease (GORD)



Gastro-oesophageal Reflux Disease (GORD) is when the stomach acid leaks back up out of the stomach and into the throat.



Sometimes the acid can go into the mouth and wear down the surfaces of the teeth.



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Diagnosis (finding out you have tooth decay)

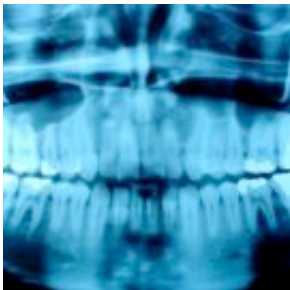


Tooth decay does not give you any symptoms until it has reached a serious stage.

It is important to have regular check-ups so that your dentist can help you before it is serious.



A dentist can see tooth decay very early on, by examining your mouth.



Your dentist may take an X-ray of your mouth if the tooth decay is in a hard place to see or is very bad.



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Treatment



Fluoride



Fluoride is probably the best treatment for tooth decay. It stops and slows down tooth decay.



Fluoride repairs damaged tooth enamel (the outside layer of the tooth).



Fluoride helps kill the bacteria and plaque in your mouth.



If your cavity (hole) is found early on, your dentist may be able to repair it by using a fluoride gel or paste.



You can also buy lots of things that have fluoride in them:



- Toothpaste and Gels



- Mouthwash



In many countries, fluoride is added to the drinking water to help with tooth decay.



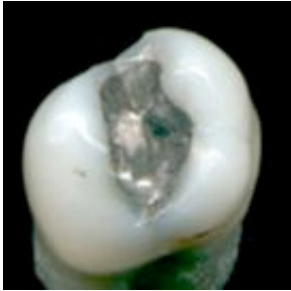
Not many people in the UK have water that has fluoride in it.



Fillings and Crowns



If the decay to one of your teeth is very bad, your dentist may repair your tooth with a **filling** or **crown**.



A filling is a small piece of either metal or resin (a type of plastic).



Your dentist puts it in place of the missing enamel.



Your dentist may need to drill away some of the damaged tooth before fitting the filling. The dentist can give you a medicine to make sure it does not hurt.



Crowns are used to treat teeth that have been very badly damaged.



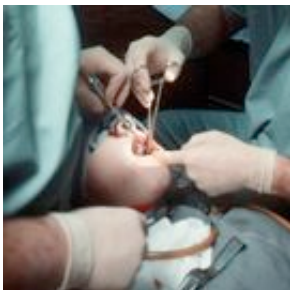
The damaged section of the tooth is drilled away. Then the crown is placed over the whole bit of tooth that is left.



Root Canal Treatment



If the decay has reached all the way to the pulp (the middle bit of the tooth where the nerves are), your dentist may need to take the last bit of pulp out.



Then your dentist will put a fake (pretend) pulp in. This is called as root canal treatment.



With the new, modern equipment that is around, this is not as painful as people think.



Taking Out a Tooth



In the worst cases, it may be necessary to take the tooth out.

Otherwise the infection would spread through the mouth to other teeth.



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Complications



Gum Disease



When tooth decay is more advanced, the bacteria can infect your gums.



It can also affect the tissue and bones that support your teeth.



Symptoms of gum infection include:



- Tender, painful gums,



- Swelling and redness in the gums.



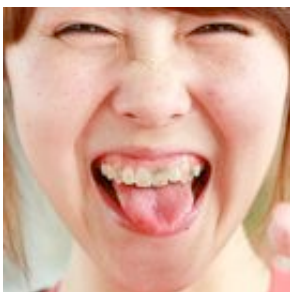
- Bleeding gums, after you brush your teeth.



The symptoms of tissue and bone infection are more serious:



- Bad breath (halitosis)



- A horrible taste in your mouth



- Difficulty eating



- Pus coming from the gums



- Teeth becoming loose or teeth falling out



Treatments for these conditions include antiseptic mouthwashes and antibiotics.



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Diet



You should try not to eat too much of the following:



- Coffee and tea with sugar added to it



- Chocolate



- Sweets



- Cakes



- Crisps



- Biscuits



- White bread (brown or wholemeal bread is better)



Try to eat more of the following:



- Cheese



- Fruit and vegetables



- Sugar free gum



- Unsweetened tea, unsweetened coffee or diet or sugar-free fizzy drinks



If you really want a sugary treat, try to just have it at a certain part of the day, or straight after meals

Brush your teeth afterwards.



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