



Preface

Good dietary habit is the key to health. We wish to dedicate this booklet to you and your 6 months to 5 years old children.

We hope that by this booklet, you will know the relationship between dietary habit and dental health. You will also help your child establish a good dietary habit, assuring his dental health.

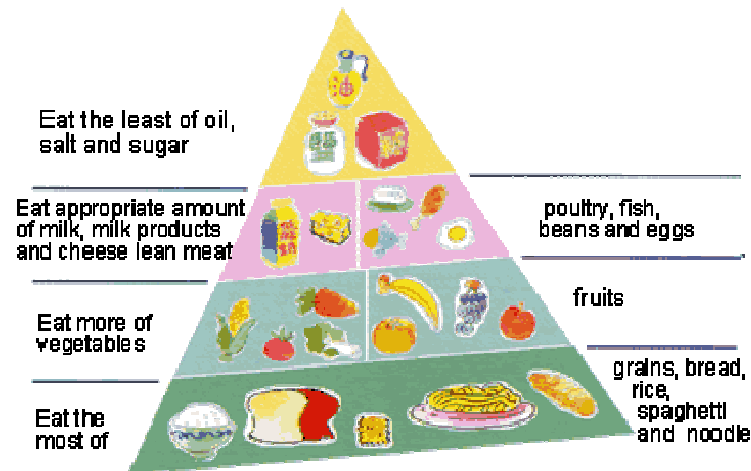


Balanced diet



Milk is the only food for the newborn. At 4 months old, the baby can gradually take a variety of supplementary food types. These include the grains, vegetables and fruits, meat, eggs and soy products. In preparing his food, no sugar or salt should be added.

Before the age of two years, breast milk or its substitute remains to be the baby's staple diet. However, when the child is over two years of age, his diet should be changed from a high fat to a low fat one, e.g. a change to low fat milk. Besides, his body energy should gradually be derived from the grains rather than milk. As for food flavouring, minimal amount of sugar or salt can be used to taste. By about 5 years old, a child's diet should be the same as that of an adult. The following diagram illustrates the food pyramid.



Balanced Diet



If a child is chronically ill, his developing teeth may be affected, showing structural or colour changes, such as enamel hypoplasia (thin enamel). These hypoplastic teeth will be more prone to tooth decay if they were not properly cared for.

Furthermore, if the sick child takes drugs like tetracycline, the drug may cause the developing teeth to change colour into yellowish-brown or bluish-grey, affecting the appearance.

Refrain from frequent snacks

There is a thin bacterial film called the dental plaque adhering to the tooth surfaces. The plaque bacteria metabolise the sugar in the food to produce acid. The acid attacks the tooth surface to cause mineral loss. However, with time the saliva neutralises the acid and the minerals will be re-deposited onto the teeth, thereby protecting the teeth.

So if a child snacks frequently, acid will continuously be produced on the tooth surfaces, over-riding the salivary function, leading to a constant loss of minerals and resulting in tooth decay.



Establish good dietary habits

One of the effective ways to prevent tooth decay is to have a good dietary habit. Regular meals with no in-between meals snacks will reduce the chances of acid attack to the teeth, hence the vulnerability to tooth decay.



Please remember the following three dietary principles that would promote dental health:

1. Provide the child with balanced and sufficient quantities of breakfast, lunch and dinner every day.



2. Provide no more than one snack in between meals only if he is hungry. A supper can also be provided before bed when needed.



3. Provide drinking water only outside meal and snack times to quench his thirst.



Tips for children's diet

Q. : My baby is 10 months old. He has 5 teeth. I give him 3 milk, 2 porridge and 1 snack (e.g. baby biscuit) a day. In addition, I let him try our food at dinner. Is that OK?

A. : Every dietary intake is a chance of acid attack on the teeth, which may lead to tooth decay. Often, parents would let their children share whatever they are eating or drinking with their children by giving them a morsel or a sip. Whether it is a piece of potato crisp, a lick of ice-cream or a sip of soft drink is considered one snack to the child. It will increase his chance of developing tooth decay. So if you wish to let your child share your food, why not arrange him to have his dinner with you so that he will have one snack less.



Tips for children's diet

Q. : From time to time, I give my baby drinks such as glucose water, fruit juice, carrot water...etc. Would these drinks have any ill-effects on his teeth?

A. : The sugars in the drinks such as glucose water, fruit juice and carrot water are the substances from which the dental plaque produces acids. Frequent consumption of these drinks may adversely affect the dental health. Therefore it is wise to refrain from giving your baby these kinds of drinks in between meals. If there is such a need, then you could let him have it at mealtime, i.e. drink it right after meal.



Tips for children's diet

Q. : My boy likes snacks, what can I do?

A. : Snacks, whether they are sweet (e.g. candies, chocolates, sweet biscuits, cakes, ice-creams...), savoury (e.g. crisps, crackers...) or sour (e.g. preserved plums, ...), are not good for both physical and dental health. This is because snacks, in general, have low nutritive values and they reduce the children's appetites for meals after taking too many. Also frequent snacking makes the children prone to tooth decay. For this reason, we should be careful not to let our children form any snacking habit.

This can be achieved by setting an example for your child and by giving him nutritious, balanced meals with no more than one in-between meals snack to satisfy his appetite and to reduce his desire for snacks.

If your child insists on having snacks, you may also suggest him to leave them until after meals.



Tips for children's diet

Q. : My parents often reward my 5-year-old girl with snacks and she keeps eating these snacks, what can I do?

A. : Adults tend to use snacks to reward children. As children often eat these snacks any time and anywhere, it constitutes a frequent snacking behaviour which would greatly increase their chances of developing tooth decay.

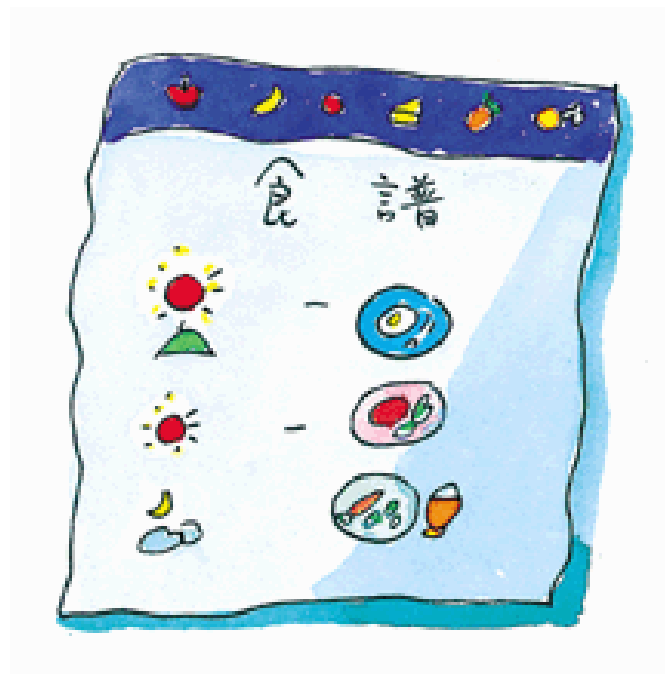
You might like to teach your daughter to give you the snacks she has received and promise to let her have them right after meals. This way you will not disappoint her. At the same time, you could suggest your parents to reward your daughter by other means, such as giving stickers, stationery, educational toys, picture books, or bring her to visit friends, to the parks, to the libraries, to the Space Museum, Science Museum, other museums etc.



Tips For Children's Diet

Q. : My son has regular mealtimes during school days but during holidays and birthdays, his diet will be in a mess. What can I do?

A. : On holidays or children's birthdays, it is inevitable for children to have mealtimes less regular than normal. However it is important to stick to frequency of no more than 5-6 meals and snacks a day. It is even more important to help him revert to the regular dietary habit as soon as holidays or birthdays are over.



Tips For Children's Diet

Q. : My daughter is 28 months old. She does not like meals, she only drinks some milk at times. He loves snacks like biscuits, cakes and crisps most. How can I improve her diet?

A. : Your daughter has an irregular dietary habit and her diet is not balanced. To improve her dietary habit, you could begin by recording all her dietary items and quantities she consumes (please refer to the dietary sheet at the end for reference). Take the record as a reference. Then re-arrange the items to give her regular mealtimes. You may do this by reducing one snack a day, so that eventually, she will be left with breakfast, lunch, dinner plus 2 in-between meals snacks every day.



Tips For Children's Diet



As far as balanced diet is concerned, you may design some children's recipes covering a variety of food and flavours. For example, you may cut bread, fruits into all kinds of shapes and serve with other food items; or you may make rice into rolls, sushi...etc. The aim is to wet her appetite. Furthermore, you may create a light-hearted, happy mealtime atmosphere. If your child cannot finish her meal in 20-30 minutes, do not make her finish but leave her alone till next meal.

Lastly, in order to further improve her dietary habit, you could evaluate her diet and the dietary schedule by keeping her dietary record form time to time.

