ORAL FITNESS FACT SHEET

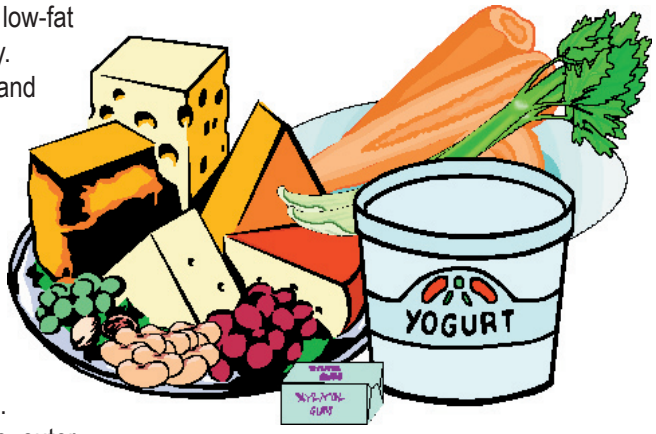
Smart Snacking

If you eat sugar-sweetened snacks, candy, mints or gum between meals, your teeth are at increased risk of decay. Every time you eat a sugary or starchy snack, bacteria make acids that attack and dissolve the hard surface (enamel) of your teeth. Acids start attacking the teeth within about 3 minutes, after eating these types of snacks.

The more starchy or sugary snacks you eat, the more acid attacks your teeth. The longer starchy or sticky snacks stay on your teeth, the more the acid attacks your teeth. Snacks such as cookies, crackers, candy bars, cakes or baked goods that contain *both* sugar *and* starches are even more harmful to your teeth.

Reduce your risk of tooth decay by:

- Eating treats immediately before or after meals.
- Eating foods with plenty of calcium (e.g., skim and low-fat milk, yogurt, cheese) to repair or reverse tooth decay.
- Limiting between meal snacks containing sugars and starches.
- Drink water right after snacking.
- Brushing and flossing at least twice a day.



Tooth-friendly snack foods are:

- Nuts, raw vegetables and **plain** yogurt that do not promote the growth of decay-causing bacteria.
- Hard cheese, especially cheddar, that neutralizes decay-causing acids that are produced by bacteria. Cheese also contains calcium, which hardens the outer surface of teeth after an acid attack.
- Black tea, which contains fluoride that may protect against gum disease and tooth decay.
- Sugar-free gum or candy
- Xylitol gum or mints. Xylitol is a natural sweetener found in fruits that is just as sweet as sugar. It blocks bacteria from making acid which causes tooth decay.

Choose healthy snack foods that protect or improve your oral health. When deciding what snack to eat, think about:

- The type of snack (e.g., raw vegetables would be a better snack than potato chips)
- The number of times you eat sugary and starchy snacks (the more often you snack, the more likely you are to get tooth decay)
- How long the snack stays in your mouth
- The texture of the snack. Starchy or sticky foods stay on the teeth longer.

Eat snacks that are nutritious and less harmful to your teeth.

SNACK SMART!

USACHPPM Readiness thru Health
Directorate of Health Promotion and Wellness
http://chppm-www.apgea.army.mil/dhpw/oralfitnessmain.aspx