

## Halloween Candy!

By Dr. Chiann Fan Gibson

Now that Halloween has come and gone, many of us have children who enjoyed getting all that candy and still have a huge stash that could fill up a pillowcase. Sugar consumption leads to cavities. This is a parental concern, as it will eventually lead to expensive visits to the dentist.

OK, parents, did you know the average American consumes an astonishing 2 to 3 pounds of sugar each week? It is not just candy, but from our daily consumption of sodas, breads, cereals, sauces, microwave meals, peanut butter, ketchup and mayonnaise. Did you know soft drinks alone can contain as much as 11 teaspoons of sugar per serving?

Sugars consumed in high amounts are not good for one's overall health anyway. A healthy mouth and body are the result of the choices we make with the foods we eat. When we consume foods with sugars, those sugars immediately begin attacking the surface of our teeth. Sugars definitely play a role in tooth decay because the bacteria that forms to become plaque use sugar as a form of energy. They multiply faster, and the plaque grows in size and thickness.

Our saliva is our body's primary defense system in the oral environment. Sometimes the plaque that forms on your teeth isn't washed away by saliva. Saliva helps buffer acids and flushes food and bacteria from the teeth. Saliva also helps replenish calcium, phosphate and fluoride ions, which help to remineralize (strengthen) enamel.

When plaque forms on your teeth and isn't washed away by saliva or tooth-brushing, an acid is produced dissolving the minerals that make your tooth enamel hard. The enamel then becomes porous. These tiny holes created in the tooth enamel eventually get bigger until finally a large hole appears on the tooth - this is a cavity.

Usually, when the enamel surface is attacked by acids, we don't feel pain because nerve fibers aren't present in enamel. However, when the acid eats through the enamel and a cavity is born, it attacks the dentin (the next layer beneath the enamel). Your nerve fibers then begin to signal out a message that something is not right. But by then, it's too late. You already have tooth decay.

An interesting study I recently reviewed mentioned, "Eating cheese might actually help protect teeth from cavities." How?

Milk and dairy products generally provide a good source of calcium, which is essential to the development of strong bones and teeth, which may aid in the prevention of weakening of enamel structure. As the saying goes, "Milk does a body good."

Each time we eat a snack containing sugar or starch (carbohydrates), the resulting acid attack on teeth can last up to 20 minutes, so don't forget to brush your teeth twice a day and floss. If you don't floss, you miss cleaning up to 35 percent of each tooth, and you end up with possible cavities between your teeth.

Nutrition is the key to healthy teeth and gums. Consume foods and beverages with high sugar content in moderation. Though I'm not a nutritionist, it is recommended that we follow the USDA's dietary guidelines. And don't forget to follow your dentist's guidelines to win the battle against plaque attack!