

# THE ORAL HEALTH EXPERT

Ring in the New Year by adding tooth-healthy minerals to your diet. Plus, find out why fluoride is so important for your oral health.

DELTA DENTAL OF ARIZONA

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## How Healthy Teeth Are Linked to Rocks



**Fluoride—a key mineral for strong teeth—originates in rocks. It's then released into soil, water and air. So, if fluoride is naturally found in water, why is it added to our water supply and toothpaste? Before we answer, let's explore why the American Dental Association labeled fluoride “nature's cavity fighter.”**

**Fluoride is important for teeth.** Fluoride strengthens tooth enamel, which helps protect your teeth from decay. It also combats acids in your mouth that can cause cavities. Fluoride can even rebuild the surface of your teeth in the early stages of tooth decay.

**Fluoride is found in water, toothpaste and more.** Most water naturally contains fluoride but usually not enough to prevent tooth decay. Because teeth benefit from consistent exposure to fluoride, many communities add fluoride to water supplies. Approximately 75% of the U.S. population on public water systems benefits from regular access to fluoridated tap water.<sup>1</sup>

Some bottled waters may contain fluoride—depending on the water source—but most do not. If the label reads de-ionized, purified, demineralized or distilled, it has only trace amounts or no fluoride unless it's listed as an added ingredient.

Toothpaste is another significant source of fluoride as more than 95% of toothpaste sold in the U.S. contains fluoride.<sup>2</sup> Brushing with a fluoride toothpaste twice a day and drinking fluoridated water is an excellent way to consistently get fluoride.

Because fluoride is so important for children at high risk of cavities, dentists may prescribe fluoride supplements such as tablets or liquids. Your dentist can also apply a fluoride varnish, gel or foam to teeth. Dental plans usually cover fluoride treatments for children but not for adults. Check your plan to see what's covered.

## Can Lemon Water Harm Your Teeth?



There's nothing better than a tall glass of water when you're thirsty. Adding a slice of lemon can make it an even more inviting beverage to sip. A little flavoring in our water often makes it tastier, helping us stay hydrated. But, have you ever stopped to wonder how lemon water affects your tooth enamel?

Lemon juice, like many fruit juices, is acidic. This means when we drink it, it can cause damage to our tooth enamel. In fact, lemon juice has a pH level of 2-3,<sup>3</sup> putting it firmly in the realm of acidic drinks. Liquids with a pH level under four<sup>4</sup> have been proven to negatively affect our oral health.

While conventional wisdom would lead you to believe that quickly brushing your teeth after sipping on some fruity water will alleviate any lasting effects, it can actually make the situation worse!

Once your enamel has been weakened by acidity, it needs time to recover. This means you must wait at least 30 minutes after consuming acidic items to prevent accidentally brushing your enamel away. Without healthy and strong enamel protecting your teeth, they're more susceptible to cavities.

Can't give up your lemon water? Here are some suggestions to help protect your teeth:

### Limit the amount you drink.

Instead of making lemon in your water a standard practice, make it more of a special occasion. The less regular exposure to acid, the stronger your teeth will remain.

### Use a straw.

Straws are taking a lot of heat due to their throwaway nature and lack of recyclability. But, using a straw can help make sure your lemon water goes down with minimal contact with your teeth. Consider investing in your own reusable straw, so you can protect your teeth and the environment.

### Rinse your mouth with water.

A glass of regular water is probably not the first thing you'd reach for after a glass of lemon water, but you should. It washes away the acid that's left hanging onto your teeth. Water cleanses the mouth and stimulates saliva, which is good for protecting your teeth.

### Brush and floss regularly.

One of the best ways to avoid a serious oral health issue is to routinely brush your teeth twice a day and floss once per day. This will ensure that there's no plaque or other debris left to cause problems. Just make sure you give your teeth at least 30 minutes to recover after drinking sodas, fruit juices and any other acidic beverages.

# SMILE STATS



Lactose intolerance was one of Leonard Hofstadter's many joked about health conditions on the popular comedy "The Big Bang Theory."



Fluoride occurs naturally in many foods, including crab, shrimp, carrots and spinach.



In the 1870s, it was reported that skilled dentists charged 25 cents to pull a tooth and 75 cents for a filling.

# Essential Minerals That Build a Healthy Smile



**When you think about calcium, the first thing that may come to mind is its role in building strong bones. Yet it does so much more than that. Calcium is needed to help your heart and nerves work properly and for your blood to clot.**

But one of this multitasking mineral's most important purposes is to keep your smile healthy. In fact, almost all of the body's calcium is found in your teeth and bones. Here's why your teeth need calcium and how you can work it into your diet.

## **Calcium is vital for your teeth.**

Acid caused by bacteria in your mouth can cause cavities by dissolving minerals—like calcium—from your enamel. Calcium protects and strengthens the enamel on the outside of your teeth, which helps ward off decay. Calcium in your saliva can also repair the places acid has damaged, working together with other minerals like fluoride and phosphorous (which also help calcium build strong teeth).

## **Many foods are rich in calcium.<sup>5,6</sup>**

Dairy products such as milk, yogurt and cheese are the most common sources of calcium. But there are additional ways to get calcium – even if you avoid dairy products. Nondairy alternatives are especially valuable for those that are lactose intolerant, vegan or allergic to dairy.

Dark green leafy vegetables are a great option as several varieties are rich in calcium, including kale, broccoli, spinach, bok choy, edamame, okra, collards and turnip greens.

Additional sources of calcium include:

- Calcium-fortified soy, almond or rice milk (look for low-sugar varieties)
- Lactose-free milk
- Canned salmon and sardines (due to tiny, soft bones)
- Tofu (check the ingredients for calcium sulfate)
- Soybeans, along with garbanzo, white, kidney and navy beans
- Calcium supplements

## **Vitamin D plays a key role in oral health, too.**

Because it helps the body absorb calcium from food, vitamin D is also necessary for strong teeth. A vitamin D deficiency may decrease the absorption of calcium by as much as two-thirds.<sup>7</sup>

- Exposure to sunshine (still wear sunscreen!)
- Milk and soymilk fortified with vitamin D
- Fatty fish, such as salmon, mackerel and tuna
- Beef liver
- Egg yolks
- Vitamin D supplements

As you make your next shopping list, keep your healthy smile in mind and look for foods high in calcium and vitamin D.



# MOUTH-HEALTHY RECIPE: BEEF AND BROCCOLI STIR-FRY

## Ingredients:



1-pound sirloin steak



2 tbsp. cornstarch



1/4 tsp. salt



1 tbsp. sesame oil



2 garlic cloves, minced



1/2 cup water



4 cups broccoli florets, chopped



1/2 cup vegetable broth



1/4 cup soy sauce

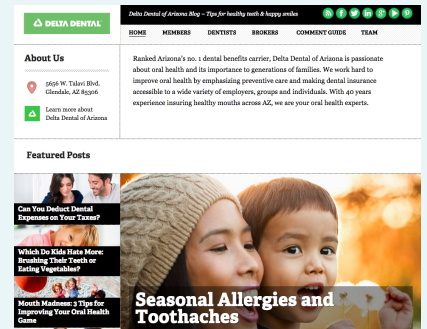
## Directions:

Slice sirloin steak into thin strips. Place steak into a large plastic bag and pour in salt and half of the cornstarch. Shake until well-coated. Heat sesame oil in large skillet over medium-high heat. Sauté beef in skillet, stirring constantly, for about 4 minutes or until it is no longer pink. Place beef in bowl and set aside. Add garlic to skillet and cook for 1 minute. Add water and broccoli, cooking for 4 to 5 minutes. Mix remaining cornstarch, vegetable broth and soy sauce in a separate dish. Put soy sauce mixture and beef in skillet and cook for 1 to 2 minutes or until sauce thickens.

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## SOURCES

<sup>1</sup><https://www.cdc.gov/fluoridation/statistics/2014stats.htm>

<sup>2</sup><https://www.cdc.gov/fluoridation/basics/fluoride-products.html>

<sup>3</sup><https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/lemon-juice-acidic-or-alkaline>

<sup>4</sup>[https://jada.ada.org/article/S0002-8177\(15\)01050-8/pdf](https://jada.ada.org/article/S0002-8177(15)01050-8/pdf)

<sup>5</sup><https://www.nichd.nih.gov/health/topics/bonehealth/conditioninfo/sources>

<sup>6</sup><https://www.webmd.com/food-recipes/guide/calcium-vitamin-d-foods>

<sup>7</sup><https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2912737/>