

# Fluorides

Tooth decay can be reduced by oral health education, effective brushing and flossing routines, and the appropriate use of fluorides.

## What is Fluoride?

Fluoride is a mineral that occurs naturally in all water sources, even the oceans.

Fluoride is effective in preventing and reversing early signs of tooth decay. Fluoride makes the tooth structure stronger, so teeth are more resistant to acid attacks. Acid is formed when the bacteria in plaque break down sugars and carbohydrates from the diet. Repeated acid attacks break down the tooth, which causes cavities. Fluoride also acts to repair, or remineralize areas in which acid attacks have already begun. The remineralization effect of fluoride is important because it reverses the early decay process as well as creates a tooth surface that is more resistant to decay.

Fluoride is obtained in two forms: systemic and topical.

## What are Systemic Fluorides?

Systemic fluorides include water fluoridation or dietary fluoride supplements in the form of tablets, drops or lozenges. Systemic fluorides become incorporated into forming tooth structures and can also give topical protection because the fluoride is present in saliva, which continually bathes the teeth.

## What are Topical Fluorides?

Topical fluorides strengthen teeth *already present* in the mouth making them more decay-resistant. Topical fluorides include toothpastes, mouth rinses, and professionally applied fluoride therapies.

## What is a Fluoride Varnish?

Fluoride varnish is an effective, easy-to-apply topical fluoride treatment that helps prevent tooth decay in young children. The fluoride is absorbed into the tooth surface and makes the enamel harder and more resistant to tooth decay. For best results, fluoride varnish should be applied on the teeth 3-4 times per year starting as soon as the child has teeth.

## How is Fluoride Varnish Applied?

Applying fluoride varnish to teeth is a simple and painless process that takes only a few minutes and is applied by trained professionals. After the teeth are checked, a thin layer of fluoride varnish is painted on the teeth that dries almost immediately. The varnish leaves a coating of fluoride that remains on the teeth until brushed or wiped away after the recommended 24 hours. Fluoride Varnish is perfect for young children since little to no fluoride is ingested.

## For more information, please contact:

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