

## ADA Healthy Smile Tips

- Brush your teeth twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste.
- Clean between your teeth once a day.
- Eat a healthy diet and limit snacks.
- Visit your dentist regularly.

For more information about taking care of your mouth and teeth, visit [MouthHealthy.org](http://MouthHealthy.org), the ADA's website just for patients.



# Fluoride: Nature's Cavity Fighter



## W102

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## Other sources of fluoride

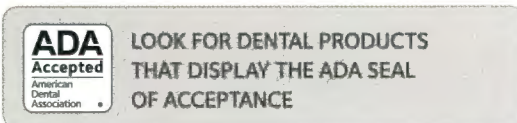
Not everyone lives in an area with fluoridated water. For those people, fluoride is available in other forms.

- **Fluoride supplements**

Fluoride pills, drops, and lozenges are available only by prescription. They are for children between 6 months and 16 years old who live in areas with little or no fluoride in the water and are at high risk of tooth decay. For best results, these fluoride products should be used every day until the child is 16 years old. Ask your child's dentist or physician about your child's fluoride needs.

- **Over-the-counter fluoride products**

Fluoride toothpastes and mouthrinses with the ADA Seal of Acceptance help prevent cavities in children and adults. When you shop for dental products, look for the ADA Seal so you know that a product is safe and effective. Your teeth and those of your children should be brushed twice a day using a toothpaste that contains fluoride.



**BRUSH**  
TWO MINUTES  
TWICE A DAY

**FLOSS**  
EVERY DAY

- **Children ages 3 to 6**

Place no more than a pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste on the toothbrush. Help your child brush and teach him or her to spit out the toothpaste and not swallow it.



For children three to six years old

- **Children under 3**

Begin brushing the teeth of your children under the age 3 as soon as teeth begin to come into the mouth. Place no more than a smear or grain-of-rice-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste on the brush. Watch children to make sure they don't swallow the toothpaste.



For children under three years old

- **Children under 6**

When it comes to use of fluoride mouthrinses, they are not recommended for children under 6.

Parents should keep an eye on children under 6 when they use any dental product with fluoride. More fluoride is not always better. These products should be stored out of the reach of young children.

Have more questions?  
Visit [MouthHealthy.org/fluoride](http://MouthHealthy.org/fluoride) for the latest information about fluoride and fluoridation.



## What is the best way to get fluoride?

Teeth get fluoride in two ways: when it is swallowed and when it is put onto the tooth's surface. To prevent cavities, it is best to get a little bit of fluoride both ways.

**Fluoride that is swallowed** usually comes from tap water. In some parts of the USA, the tap water naturally has just the right amount of fluoride. In other places, the tap water does not have enough fluoride. So some cities and towns add fluoride to the tap water. This is called "water fluoridation." If your community's water does not have enough fluoride, talk to your dentist or doctor about your family's fluoride needs.



### Bottled water

**Most bottled waters do not have the levels of fluoride needed to help prevent cavities.** If you drink bottled water frequently, you may be missing the benefits of fluoridation. To learn about the fluoride level in the water, check the label. If it is not listed, then you should contact the bottler.

### Home water treatment systems

Your home water filter system might remove fluoride from the water. Reverse osmosis and distillation units remove almost all of the fluoride. However, filters that come in pitchers or attach to your faucet generally do not remove a lot of fluoride. Check with the product's company to learn if the filter or system removes fluoride from your drinking water.

### Topical fluoride

When fluoride is **put onto the surface of your teeth**, it is called **topical fluoride**. Fluoride toothpastes and mouthrinses sold in stores that contain fluoride are one way for your teeth to get topical fluoride. Also, your dentist can apply fluoride gel or varnish to your teeth.



## What are the benefits of water fluoridation?

- Studies show water fluoridation **reduces cavities** by at least 25% in children and adults.
- It **benefits everyone**, especially those who are not able to get regular dental care.
- It **saves money**. The cost of a lifetime of fluoridated water is generally less than the cost of one filling.
- **It's easy!** You can help protect your teeth simply by drinking water, anytime, anywhere.

To find out if the tap water in your area contains fluoride at a level that can help prevent cavities, ask your dentist. You also can contact your community's water supplier. If you have a private well, the Environmental Protection Agency recommends that you test your water every year for safety and at least once every three years for fluoride levels.

## Is fluoride safe?

More than 70 years of study and experience have shown that water fluoridation is safe. Fluoridation of community water is supported by leading health organizations including the American Dental Association (ADA), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Medical Association, and the World Health Organization.

Cavities that are not treated can cause pain, loss of teeth, and spread of infection. The good news is you can prevent most cavities with good dental care and fluoride. This brochure explains how fluoride helps keep teeth strong and healthy.



## What is fluoride? Why is it important?

Fluoride (FLOOR-eyed) is a mineral that occurs naturally in all water sources — even the oceans. Fluoride can prevent cavities in children and adults. Fluoride helps protect tooth enamel from the acid attacks that cause cavities. It also helps repair weakened enamel before cavities form.