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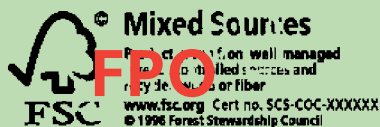
America's leading
advocate for oral health

· PREVENTIVE

Fluoride

Nature's Cavity Fighter

Cavities, or tooth decay,
used to be a fact of life.
But during the past few
decades, tooth decay has
been greatly reduced.
One key reason: fluoride.



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What is fluoride?

Fluoride is a mineral that occurs naturally in all water sources, including the oceans. Research shows that fluoride can prevent cavities in children and adults by making teeth more resistant to the acid attacks that cause cavities. Fluoride also helps repair the early stages of tooth decay even before the decay can be seen. Teeth can be exposed to fluoride in two ways:

- When fluoride is swallowed, it is called **systemic fluoride**. The most common source of systemic fluoride is fluoride in water. Optimal levels of fluoride to prevent decay can occur naturally in water. Some communities adjust the natural level of fluoride to optimal levels in a process called water fluoridation. Fluoride can also be prescribed by your dentist or physician in pills, drops and lozenges.
- When fluoride is directly applied to the surface of your teeth, it is called **topical fluoride**. Fluoride toothpastes and mouth rinses sold in stores contain topical fluoride. Also, professionally applied topical fluoride treatments in the form of gels and varnishes are available from your dentist.

Water fluoridation

Water fluoridation is the single most effective public health measure to prevent tooth decay. It has been named one of ten great public health achievements of the 20th century by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Simply by drinking water, people can benefit from fluoridation's cavity protection whether they are at home, work or school. Today, studies prove water fluoridation continues to be effective in reducing tooth decay by 20–40%, even in an era with widespread availability of fluoride from other sources, such as fluoride toothpaste.

To find out if the water in your community contains fluoride at a level to prevent tooth decay, ask your dentist or contact your local, county or state health department or water supplier. If you have a private well, the EPA recommends that it be tested every year. Contact your local, county or state health department to get a list of certified labs that can test fluoride levels.

Bottled water

Individuals who drink bottled water could be missing the benefits of water fluoridation. The vast majority of bottled waters do not contain levels of fluoride needed to help prevent tooth decay. Check the label and contact the bottler if necessary to learn about the fluoride level of bottled water. A number of bottlers can supply bottled water with optimal levels of fluoride on request.

Home water treatment systems

If you drink or cook with water treated by a home water filter system, you might also be missing out on the decay preventing effects of fluoride. Check with the product's maker to learn if the system removes fluoride from your drinking water.

Is fluoride safe?

More than 65 years of study and experience have shown that water fluoridation is safe. Fluoridation of community water supplies is supported by the American Dental Association, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the U.S. Public Health Service, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Medical Association and the World Health Organization.



Other sources of fluoride

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

• Dietary fluoride supplements

Fluoride tablets, drops or lozenges are available only by prescription. They are for children between six months and 16 years old, who live in areas with low levels or no fluoride in the water. For best results, these fluoride products should be used every day until the individual is about sixteen years old. Ask your dentist or child's physician about your child's fluoride needs.

• Over-the-counter fluoride products

Fluoride toothpastes and mouth rinses with the ADA Seal of Acceptance help prevent tooth decay for children and adults. When you shop for dental products, look for the ADA Seal so you know that a product is safe and effective.



Products should be used as noted on the label. Parents should keep an eye on all dental products with fluoride used by children under age six. More is not always better. These products should be stored out of the reach of young children.

For children over two years of age, place only one pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste on a child's toothbrush at each brushing. Young children should be helped while brushing and taught to spit out, rather than swallow, the toothpaste. If you are thinking of using fluoride toothpaste before the child reaches age two, first ask your child's dentist or physician. Fluoride mouth rinse is not recommended for children under six years of age because they may swallow the rinse.

Check the web site of the American Dental Association at www.ada.org for the latest information about fluoride and fluoridation.