

Straight Talk on Fluoride

Fluoride is in the water we drink, the toothpaste we brush with and the dentist seems to like it. There are also some people that are very leery of fluoride, just do an internet search. But what is fluoride and why does the dentist recommend it?

It is always good to start with some basics:

1. Fluoride is the negative ion of fluorine, an element found on the periodic table next to oxygen.
2. Fluoride occurs naturally in water. This is why you might find fluoride listed as an ingredient on your bottled spring water.
3. Scientists first discovered the link between fluoride in drinking water and decreased cavities in the 1930's.
4. In 1945 Grand Rapids, Michigan was the first community to add fluoride to its municipal water system.
5. Fluoride is toxic, only if you get too much. Vitamins, like A and K, are also toxic if you get too much.
6. Fluorosis is damage to the teeth from too much fluoride exposure.
7. If your water has the correct amount of fluoride, data shows that people have 25% fewer cavities with no fluorosis.¹
8. Evidence accumulated from long-term use of fluorides has demonstrated that the cost of oral health care for children can be reduced by as much as 50 percent.²

To get the right amount of fluoride, use a “smear” of tooth paste under 3 years old and use a pea sized amount if you are older³, spit out your toothpaste and don't swallow mouthwash. Consult with your dentist to determine if other sources of fluoride (mouth rinses, special toothpaste) would be beneficial for you or your child's dental health.



Fluoride is like many things in life, there can be too much of a good thing. But, if you get the right amount of fluoride you will get fewer cavities, spend less money and have healthier teeth.

Sources

1. CDC. Achievements in public health, 1900-1999: Fluoridation of drinking water to prevent dental caries. MMWR 1999;48(12): 933-40
2. Griffen SO, Jones K, Tomar, SL. An economic evaluation of community water fluoridation. J Pub Health Dent 2001;61(2): 78-86
3. American Dental Association Council on Scientific Affairs: Fluoride toothpaste use for young children. JADA 2014; 145(2): 190-191