



What Is Plaque?

Plaque is a soft, sticky bacterial deposits which form on teeth. It continuously accumulates on everyone's teeth, especially near the gums and between the teeth. A build-up of plaque can cause tooth decay (dental caries) and gum disease.

When you eat foods containing sugars and starches, the bacteria in plaque produces plaque acids, which attack tooth surfaces. Plaque acid can dissolve tooth enamel, so frequent eating and drinking throughout the day can put your teeth at risk. After many acid attacks, the tooth enamel breaks down and a cavity forms.

Plaque cannot be prevented from forming, but careful tooth cleaning every day will help remove plaque. If plaque is not removed with a proper brushing and flossing, it can combine with minerals in saliva, and hardens to form tartar (calculus). Once tartar has formed, it can only be removed by professional cleaning by a dentist or hygienist.

The rate at which plaque forms and the location in which it develops varies between individuals and between different teeth in the same mouth. Saliva is important in fighting plaque acid and some prescription drugs can reduce saliva, thus increasing the risk of decay.

The earliest stages of tooth decay will only be visible to your dentist or hygienist, so dental check-ups are important.

How can plaque be prevented from building up?

- Brush your teeth thoroughly twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste
- Clean in between the teeth with a dental floss
- Have a dental check-up at least once a year
- Cut down on sugar or starch containing snacks or drinks between meals

