

*kids say “aaah”*

**MetLife**



# Kids’ Tooth Decay Risk Guide\*

## Learning to protect your teeth from tooth decay



Tooth decay is a problem for many children. Tooth decay is caused when bacteria (germs) in your mouth combine with sugar that you eat or drink to make acids that dissolve the outer layers of your teeth. If too much dissolves, your tooth breaks down, and you end up with a “cavity” or hole in your tooth.

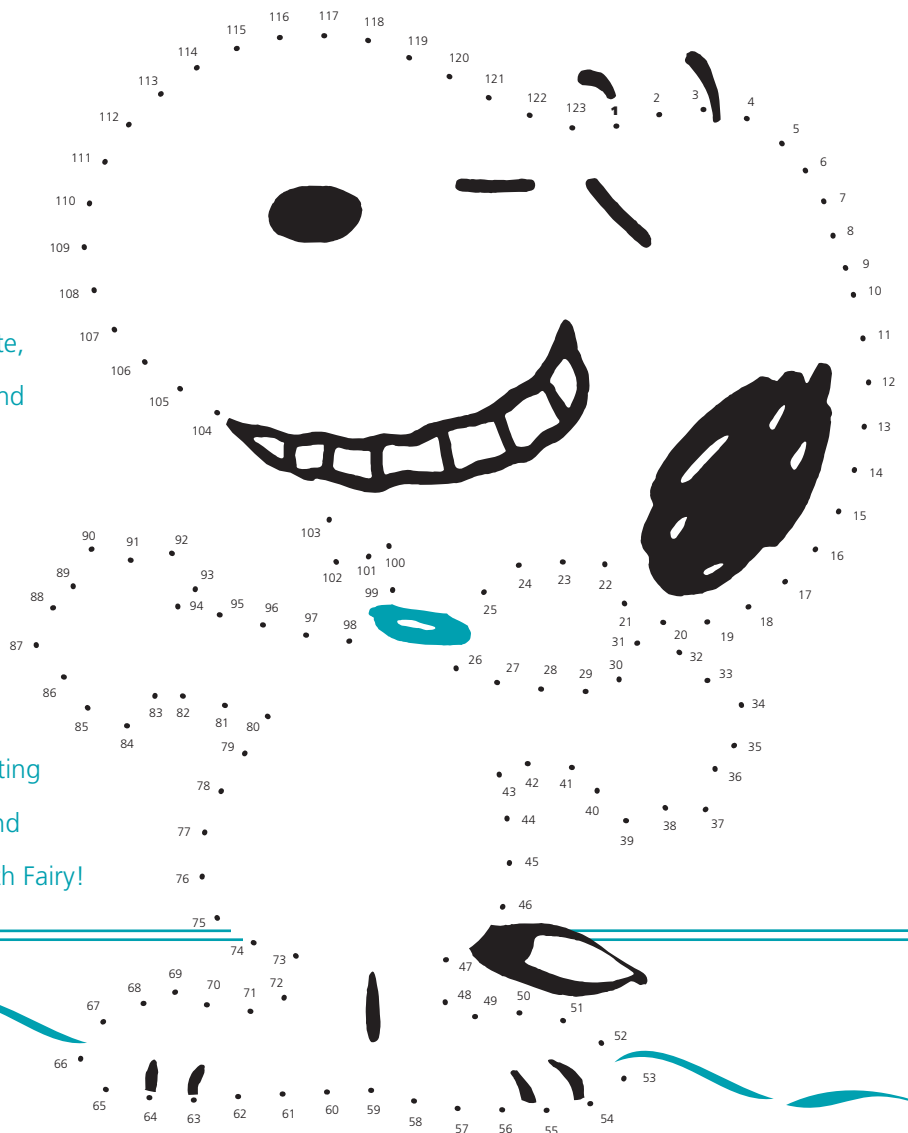
\*Developed by James J. Crall, DDS, ScD, with input from the MetLife Dental Advisory Council.

# “aaah”

For most kids, teeth can be protected from decay by daily brushing with fluoride toothpaste, limiting snacks and drinks with lots of sugar, and having regular dental check-ups.

Knowing what causes tooth decay will help you prevent cavities.

The questions in this guide will help you learn about things that may place you at risk for getting tooth decay. Please answer all the questions and be honest—remember, you can't fool the Tooth Fairy!



Questions 1 through 7

Things that can increase tooth decay. A "Yes" to these questions means that you may need to take action to lower your tooth decay risk.

Questions 8 through 13

Things that can help reduce tooth decay or help protect your teeth. A "No" to these questions means that you may need to take action to lower your decay risk.

## Questions

	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
1 Are there days when you forget or don't have time to brush your teeth?			
2 Are there days when you don't use toothpaste that has fluoride?			
3 Do your gums bleed when you brush your teeth?			
4 Can you remember having a cavity, decayed tooth, toothache or a filling?			
5 Do you snack on candy or other sugary foods? Do you have drinks with sugar (like soda or juice) or chew gum between meals more than twice a day?			
6 Do you wear braces, a space maintainer (spacers), retainer or orthodontic appliances?			
7 Do your brothers, sisters or mother get cavities?			
8 Does the water you drink every day have fluoride?			
9 Do you take fluoride drops or tablets every day?			
10 Does the dentist check your teeth at least once a year?			
11 Does the dentist or dental hygienist give you a fluoride treatment at least once a year?			
12 Have you had dental sealants placed on your back teeth?			
13 Do you chew gum or eat mints that contain xylitol?			

Show your answers to your dentist or dental hygienist at your next visit.



# Understanding and Reducing Your Risk for Tooth Decay

The following information matches the numbered questions, and can help you reduce your risk for tooth decay.

- 1 Tooth brushing: Bacteria (germs) that produce acid can build up as plaque in your mouth every day. You need to brush your teeth every day to remove plaque and reduce its ability to cause decay. It is best if you brush at least twice a day.
- 2 Fluoride toothpaste: Everyday use of even small amounts of fluoride can help prevent tooth decay and help “repair” damaged teeth during the early stages of decay. You should brush your teeth with fluoride toothpaste twice every day. Be sure to spit out any excess toothpaste. Don’t swallow it.
- 3 Bleeding gums or visible plaque on your teeth: Bleeding gums or visible plaque (soft, white material) on your teeth are signs that you are not brushing away germs next to your teeth. The good news is that if you start brushing properly every day, the bleeding (and infection) should stop within two weeks!
- 4 Cavities or decayed teeth: If you’ve had decay, cavities or fillings in the past two years it means that you don’t have the right balance between your risk factors and your protective factors. You need to take action to lower your risk and see a dentist to help protect you from tooth decay.
- 5 Snacking on candy or other sugary foods, drinks with sugar (like soda and juice) or chewing gum with sugar between meals: Having lots of foods, drinks and gums that have lots of sugar—especially between meals—can increase germs that lead to tooth decay. You need to limit sugary foods, drinks and chewing gum between meals and try to brush your teeth after with fluoride toothpaste. Gum or mints that have xylitol can help reduce the damaging effects of acid on teeth and may be used when you can’t brush your teeth.
- 6 Braces, “spacers,” retainers or other orthodontic appliances: Braces, space maintainers (spacers) and other dental or orthodontic appliances often trap plaque and make it difficult to remove germs. If you wear an appliance, you’re at higher risk for decay. You need to clean around your braces, retainers or “spacers” really well and make sure you brush with fluoride toothpaste.
- 7 Brothers, sisters or mother with decay: If your brothers, sisters or mother get cavities, you may be exposed to the same risk factors that cause tooth decay. Make sure that you’re doing the right things to lower your risk and protect your teeth.
- 8 Drinking water that has fluoride: Proper amounts of fluoride in drinking water is a safe, effective and easy way to reduce tooth decay.
- 9 Extra fluoride: Fluoride in water can help reduce the risk of tooth decay, but may not totally prevent cavities in all children. You may need to use fluoride drops or supplements, especially if you drink mostly bottled water that doesn’t contain fluoride, or if you live in an area where the drinking water does not have enough fluoride.
- 10 Regular dental check-ups: Tooth decay or cavities can happen in only a few months in children at high risk. Visits to your dentist (with X-rays if needed) can help find decay early when fluoride and sealants can do the most good. Your dentist will tell you how often you should get a check-up, but make sure you have at least one check-up every year.
- 11 Professional fluoride treatments: Regular professional fluoride treatments can provide protection against cavities and promote “repair” of teeth damaged by the early stages of decay. Your dentist will recommend how often you should get these treatments based on your risk factors.
- 12 Dental sealants: Dental sealants are usually placed in the pits and grooves on the biting surfaces of the “back teeth” to keep plaque out and help prevent decay.
- 13 Xylitol: Some chewing gums and mints have xylitol, which helps to protect your teeth against germs that can cause tooth decay. Using gum or mints with xylitol instead of gums or candy that have sugar can help lower your risk of tooth decay. Using xylitol doesn’t take the place of regular brushing with fluoride toothpaste, but can help after meals or snacks when you don’t have your toothbrush or toothpaste.

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