

20 Common Questions about Fluoride

1 How common are cavities?

According to the American Dental Association (ADA), dental cavities, or tooth decay, is one of the most prevalent diseases in humans, affecting 97% of the population worldwide during their lifetimes¹.

2 What can you do to help reduce the risk of cavities?

To reduce the risk of cavities (tooth decay), the American Dental Association (ADA) recommends focusing on good oral hygiene, diet, and professional dental care. This includes brushing twice daily with fluoride toothpaste, flossing daily, limiting sugary foods and drinks, and seeing a dentist regularly for checkups and cleanings².

3 What is fluoride?

Fluoride is a mineral that is naturally found in soil, water, foods and beverages. It is widely used in dentistry to help prevent tooth decay³.

4 What is the difference between fluoride in my oral care products and fluoride in my water?

Topical fluorides: Fluoride in toothpastes and mouth rinses help prevent tooth decay. Prescription strength fluoride toothpaste, gels and varnishes may also be recommended by your Dental professional if you are at high-risk of cavities.
Systemic fluorides: Fluoride may be present in drinking water to help strengthen teeth.

5 How does fluoride help prevent tooth decay?

Fluoride strengthens tooth enamel by promoting remineralization and making teeth more resistant to acid attacks from bacteria in the mouth. Fluoride is effective at reducing tooth decay and is recommended by dental professionals for both children and adults⁵.

6 What are the main benefits of fluoride in oral care products?

Protecting teeth requires consistent, low levels of fluoride in the mouth (in the saliva and on tooth surfaces). Fluoride can also be incorporated into developing dental enamel before a tooth erupts into the mouth, enhancing the tooth's resistance to acid breakdown and preventing cavities later in life. Fluoride oral care products are effective in preventing cavities. They are regulated as drugs by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and are safe and effective when used as directed².

7 How safe is fluoride in oral care products for children and adults?

Decades of research and practical experience indicate that fluoride in oral care products, such as toothpaste, rinses, and fluoride varnish is safe and beneficial to oral health⁶.

8 What are the risks of fluoride in oral care products?

Dental fluorosis is a change in the appearance of the tooth enamel that can occur when younger children consume too much fluoride, from any source, over long periods when teeth are developing under the gums³. Excess fluoride exposure can be minimized by using the recommended amount of toothpaste and by storing toothpaste where young children cannot access it without parental assistance⁵.

9 Are there risks to choosing only fluoride-free oral care products?

The main risk is a higher chance of developing cavities. All toothpastes with the ADA Seal of Acceptance for Cavity Prevention must contain fluoride. A product earns the ADA Seal of Acceptance for Cavity Prevention by submitting clinical studies that demonstrate the safety and efficacy of the fluoride toothpaste for cavities prevention².

- 10 What happens to tooth enamel if I never use fluoride toothpaste?**
Without fluoride toothpaste, your tooth enamel is not as well protected and can be more easily weakened by acids and bacteria, increasing your risk of cavities.
- 11 Can I use fluoride oral care products if my tap water is fluoridated?**
Yes, because fluoride in water and in toothpaste work differently. The fluoride in toothpaste is meant to be used topically meaning right on the tooth. It is not meant to be swallowed but to expectorate after use (spit it out).
- 12 How does fluoride in toothpaste actually help prevent cavities?**
Fluoride helps to repair weakened areas of enamel and makes teeth stronger. It reverses the early signs of tooth decay and helps protect against future cavities¹.
- 13 Is fluoride toothpaste necessary for children and adults with good eating and brushing habits?**
While a healthy diet is good for your teeth, research shows fluoride provides extra protection even if your eating habits are excellent².
- 14 What are the benefits of using professional recommended prescription strength fluoride toothpaste?**
Prescription strength fluoride toothpaste (5000 ppm) increases resistance to acid and enhances fluoride penetration into enamel which helps prevent cavities. The World Health Organization (WHO), American Dental Association (ADA) and American Association of Pediatric Dentists (AAPD) recommend prescription strength fluoride toothpaste for adults and children 6 years and older that are at high risk of cavities^{5,7,8}. Talk to your dental professional for more information.
- 15 How much prescription strength fluoride toothpaste should I use?**
Adults and children ages 6+ should brush with a thin ribbon of prescription strength toothpaste. Parents should supervise children 6-12 years old to ensure they don't swallow the product. Children should expectorate and rinse thoroughly with water after use. Do not use in pediatric patients under age 6 years unless recommended by a dentist or physician.
- 16 How much fluoride is used during in office varnish treatments for patients 6 years and older?**
An ADA panel recommended application of 2.26% fluoride (5% sodium fluoride) varnish for patients 6 years and older who are at a high risk of cavities¹.
- 17 How does fluoride varnish work?**
Fluoride varnish works by being absorbed into the outer layer of the tooth (enamel), making it stronger and more resistant to decay.
- 18 How does fluoride mouth rinse work?**
While not a replacement for daily brushing and flossing, use of mouth rinse (mouthwash) offers the benefit of reaching areas not easily accessed by a toothbrush⁹. The ADA recommends prescription-strength mouth rinse (0.2% neutral sodium fluoride) for patients 6 years or older at at elevated risk of cavities¹.
- 19 Are prescription strength toothpastes, rinses and varnishes safe for children and adults?**
Prescription strength toothpaste and rinses are safe for adults and children ages 6+ when used as directed. Varnish is applied at the dentist's office, it is safe and effective for young children and adults.
- 20 Is the Fluoride in Colgate's Oral Care products safe?**
All Colgate products that contain fluoride are safe. They are formulated to comply with legal and regulatory requirements. We continuously monitor and evaluate the safety of our ingredients and actively engage with outside experts and resources to stay up to date on all emerging science and to deepen our knowledge.

1. www.ada.org/resources/ada-library/oral-health-topics/caries-risk-assessment-and-management

2. www.ada.org/resources/ada-library/oral-health-topics/home-care

3. www.ada.org/resources/community-initiatives/fluoride-in-water/fluoridation-faqs

4. www.ada.org/about/press-releases/community-water-fluoridation-prevents-painful-dental-disease

5. www.ada.org/resources/ada-library/oral-health-topics/fluoride-topical-and-systemic-supplements

6. www.ada.org/about/press-releases/ada-in-support-of-community-water-fluoridation

7. www.aapd.org/media/Docs/default-source/Guidelines/BP_FluorideTherapy.pdf

8. cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/essential-medicines/2021-eml-expert-committee/applications-for-addition-of-new-medicines/a.14_fluoride-toothpaste.pdf

9. www.ada.org/resources/ada-library/oral-health-topics/mouthrinse-mouthwash