

The Sugars that you can't See!

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Children and sweets are a match made in heaven- in fact our childhood memories are incomplete without sweets. Parents have been taking all kinds of precautions to limit and minimize the sugar intake of their children threatening them about "black teeth". And yet even the strictest parents complain of too many cavities in their child's mouth.

Yes, there are many factors contributing to tooth decay other than sugar intake and sweets alone. But what we fail to realise that no matter how much we try to limit the direct consumption, the indirect sugars continue to play a major role in our diet.

These indirect sugars include artificial sweeteners or refined sugars masked within day to day food items. Now the next obvious thing that comes to mind is another popular favourite: ice-cream! But what if you found out that ice-creams are much far in the list. Okay let me ask you. what your child's basic breakfast? Milk, cereals, sandwiches, jams, or Chapati? Well, there goes your first dose of sugar. Milk contains naturally occurring lactose sugars whereas carbohydrates produce glucose once digested. Also, ketchup...yes flavoured sauces too contain added sugars. Next come the chips and biscuits which even we adults' snack on.

And let's not forget the famous "energy boosting" drinks which contain the most sugars and carbohydrates.

The term SUGARFREE is the biggest scam of this generation. In these products the real sugar is replaced with artificial sweeteners. According to the USDA Economic Research Services the average kid under 12 years of age consumes 4 - 9 pounds of sugar per year. AHA has declared that the average amount of added sugars one should eat in a day is 3 - 6 tablespoons.

Now I can understand that in the daily run it's difficult to practically measure foods, but care should be taken to make sure whatever your child eats doesn't stick to the teeth for a long time. It's the STICKY foods like caramel that cause more harm. Also, one tip I find useful is to try and avoid taking your children for grocery shopping. You never get the time to actually read the contents of the products you're buying.

The answer is simple. Consistency. Keep a habit of cleaning the infant's mouth since the day they grow their first tooth. No sugar should be fed by the age of 2. Inculcate habits of chewing on boiled vegetables and fruits as snacks. And if at all you want to give something sweet to your kid replace the sugar with jaggery and honey. It's better to make this switch in the early years.

I know the challenge is a tough one and yes, the graph of children requiring dental treatments is reducing but it's not sufficient enough. Let's vow to make changes in our lifestyle as parents first and then pass on our good habits to raise a generation of healthy teeth.

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