



**F**luoride plays an important role in oral health by helping to prevent tooth decay, strengthening tooth enamel and reducing the harmful effects of plaque.

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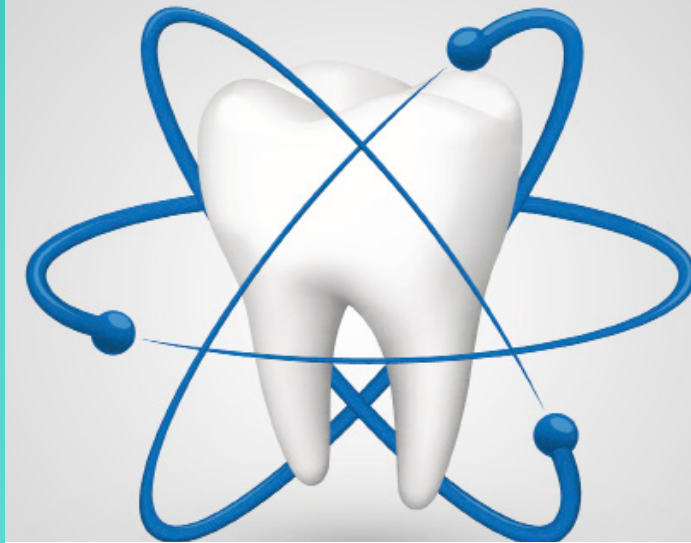
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## FLUORIDE AND YOUR Oral Health



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## Why is fluoride important for my oral health?

Fluoride is a compound that occurs naturally in nature. When

applied directly to teeth or ingested, fluoride can have beneficial effects on the mouth by helping to prevent tooth decay, strengthening tooth enamel and reducing the harmful effects of plaque. The maximum benefits of fluoride are realized when it is utilized during all stages of tooth development and when applied to the tooth surface.

Fluoride can be ingested through fluoridated water, certain foods and dietary fluoride supplements. Or, it can be applied topically through toothpastes, mouth rinses and professionally administered fluoride treatments.

## How can I get the fluoride I need?

In the 1940s, scientists discovered a direct correlation between the level of naturally occurring fluoride in public drinking water and the amount of tooth decay experienced by local residents. Soon after, communities

began adjusting the fluoride that occurs naturally in water to optimal levels to prevent tooth decay in their regions.

But not all public water companies fluoridate their water, and well and spring waters carry varying levels of fluoride by region. Factor in the popularity of bottled water, which typically contains little, if any, fluoride, and your chances of getting the right amount of fluoride according to current dental industry standards is unlikely.

To make sure you and your family are getting the right amount of fluoride, contact your public water supplier and ask what level of fluoride is in the water. If you have a well or spring, a water test will reveal the water's natural fluoride content. For bottled or filtered water, contact the manufacturing company for information.

Share the information with your dentist. Since age and weight play a major factor in determining how much fluoride you should have, treatment plans may vary by family member. If your water is not fluoridated, your dentist may suggest a dietary fluoride supplement, an effective alternative to water fluoridation for the prevention of dental decay. As with other nutrients, fluoride is safe and effective when used and consumed properly.

## Too much of a good thing

While not getting enough fluoride can lead to tooth decay, getting too much can lead to a change in the appearance of teeth called fluorosis. This occurs when higher than optimal amounts of fluoride are ingested in early childhood when tooth enamel is forming. Mild cases of fluorosis are evidenced by a few white spots on teeth while more severe cases turn teeth a brownish color and weaken the enamel. Risk can be greatly reduced by monitoring the use of fluoride products by young children.

*Additional related information can be found on the Web sites of the Academy of General Dentistry, [www.agd.org](http://www.agd.org) and the American Dental Association, [www.ada.org](http://www.ada.org); and in *Oral Health in America: A Report of the Surgeon General, 2000*.*

