



## Tooth-Friendly Foods

Brush up on ways to keep your mouth healthy.

BY GINA ROBERTS-GREY

**Y**ou brush and floss daily, and these are important steps in your daily routine. But did you know that a few of “nature’s toothbrushes” also can help keep your mouth healthy? From fighting periodontal disease to killing bacteria and fighting stains, certain foods and beverages play a vital role in oral care. Add a few of these items to your shopping list to help maintain a naturally beautiful smile.

### Cranberries

Minerals in these tart treats form a shield over teeth to block stains caused by spaghetti sauce, coffee, red wine, and colas. Researchers at the University of Rochester in New



York learned that cranberries also inhibit enzymes that bacteria

need to live on teeth, and cranberries prevent plaque buildup, the precursor to gingivitis. “This shield remains effective for three to four hours,” says Marc Liechtung, DMD, PC, of New York—as long as you don’t brush afterward. Drink an 8-ounce glass of straight-up cranberry juice, without added sweetener, before eating tomato sauce or blueberry pie to protect teeth and porcelain crowns from stains.

### Carrots

Ever wonder how Bugs Bunny keeps his front teeth so white? Carrots. Eaten fresh and raw, this crisp, colorful vegetable mechanically increases saliva production, which continually flushes the mouth to reduce germs and bacteria,



## FOODS TO AVOID FOR A HEALTHY MOUTH

**Caramel, honey, and raisins.** These sticky sweets adhere to your teeth, leaving them coated with decay-causing residue. **Carbonated beverages.**

Highly acidic, these drinks contribute to decay by lowering the pH levels in your mouth.

**Sour candies.** These mouth-puckering treats pack the doubly nasty punch of acidity and sugar, making sour candies twice as likely as other sweets to cause cavities.

according to Georgianna Donadio, DC, PhD, integrative health expert, nutritionist, and founder of the National Institute of Whole Health. Carrots also prevent bacteria from attaching to teeth. Snack on a few baby carrots throughout the day to stimulate your gums and sweep debris away from areas where extra food particles and bacteria can become trapped.

### Limes, lemons, and oranges

The megadose of vitamin C found in these citrus fruits effectively kills the bacteria that form as a result of sugars, food fragments, and plaque on your teeth. The vitamin C in citrus also supports a healthy collagen network in your gums, which keeps your gums from receding and prevents periodontal disease. But who can down a sour lime for a snack? Instead, squeeze a wedge of lemon or lime into an 8-ounce glass of water to give your gums a healthy dose of vitamin C.



### Yogurt



“When the pH level in your mouth dips below 5.5, the increase in acidity causes your teeth to undergo a demineralization process. This process leads to decay,” says dentist Jimmy Wu, DDS, of San Diego. As little as a few tablespoons of yogurt quickly

restores the pH level in your mouth to the healthy target of 7, and the phosphate, calcium, and casein in the yogurt help remineralize your teeth. Unsweetened, low-fat yogurt is the best bet for your teeth, as well as your weight.

### Grapefruit

Researchers have found that grapefruit increases blood levels and promotes wound healing throughout your body. And according to a study in the *British Dental Journal*, eating two grapefruits a day helps reduce gingivital bleeding. Although consuming that much grapefruit in a day may sound a bit ambitious, Donadio says that one or even a half a grapefruit a day can still benefit your mouth.



### Green tea

“The antioxidant catechins in green tea kill the cavity-causing bacteria in your mouth as well as the bacteria that cause bad breath,” says Wu. ‘Nuff said. End a meal with a cup of green tea to freshen your breath and help your saliva rid your mouth of sugars and bacteria. **AM**



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