

# Take on tooth decay

Fluoride can help curb cavities and other problems. *by Dr. Susan Maples*

**C**hildren's Dental Health Month is a good time to remind parents that tooth decay is still the number one childhood disease among all races and socioeconomic classes—and it's 100% preventable!

It can be painful, infecting, and if left untreated even life-threatening. Did you know that in the U.S., children lose 51 million school hours per year due to dental disease?

Why?

Our sugar consumption is out of control and our food and beverage supply has moved the needle to "high" on the acid scale.

One critical aspect of cavity protection is fluoride, but few understand the difference between consumption (from tap water or supplements) and application (treatments and pastes).

Fluoride salt (sodium fluoride) added to our drinking water is in such a low

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concentration (about 1 ppm) as regulated by the EPA and monitored by the Safe Drinking Water Act, that it strengthens teeth without any proven potential for negative health effects.

How much is enough? And how much is too much? If you have well water you can have it analyzed by your county health department.

Fluoride is a naturally occurring substance and is sometimes present in

well water. Take the sample from your kitchen sink where most of your cooking/drinking water comes from. Share the results with your dentist to help with the calculation and prescription for your child. On average about .1 mg a day is prescribed for kids who have no fluoride in the water at home or at school.

Fluoride applied to the tooth surface is absorbed into the enamel pores (called tubules) to provide a fluoride-rich layer of outer protection. Surface fluoride needs to be continually replenished which is why it is also added to all American Dental Association approved toothpastes and rinses.

Dental literature keeps flipping the coin on which is most beneficial, intrinsic (internal fluoride) or topical. The truth is both are necessary in this fight for prevention, but there is more to the story on the cause and prevention of tooth decay.

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**FEBRUARY IS CHILDREN'S DENTAL HEALTH MONTH**

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