



You don't have to be a kid to have tooth decay. The Massachusetts Dental Society (MDS) isn't "kidding" around by stating that adults benefit from fluoride use just as much as children do.



What is fluoride?

You may have heard of a good-for-your-teeth substance called fluoride, but do you know exactly what it is? **Fluoride is a naturally-occurring mineral that can be found in water sources across the globe. Fluoride is a compound that contains the element fluorine, which is found universally in water, soil, and air.**

Fluoride is good for your teeth since it is absorbed easily into tooth enamel and is effective at preventing dental caries, otherwise known as tooth decay or cavities, by keeping tooth enamel strong.

**Strong enamel means strong teeth—
and less tooth decay.**



Fluoride also acts to repair, or remineralize, areas of the teeth that have become weakened by acid attacks.

Cities and towns that have community fluoridated water adjust the level of existing, naturally occurring fluoride in their public **drinking water** to an optimal level for oral health. This level is set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. This type of fluoride is known as *systemic fluoride*, since it is ingested. Studies have shown that fluoridation of drinking water is effective in reducing tooth decay by up to 40 percent.

According to the American Dental Association, dental decay is effectively prevented by a combination of both *systemic fluoride* and *topical fluoride*—meaning fluoride that is applied directly to the teeth.

Some examples of *topical fluoride* include:

- **Fluoridated toothpastes.** Some **mouthwashes** also contain fluoride. **Prescription-strength fluoride rinses or toothpastes** may also be prescribed for individuals who are at a higher risk of decay. Some of these risk factors may include a previous history of tooth decay or certain medical conditions, such as dry mouth.
- **Fluoride varnish** is a gel that may be “painted” directly onto the tooth surface. A fluoride treatment may also consist of gel or foam that is placed in a tray and held against the teeth for several minutes.

Fluoride supplements, such as tablets or drops, are also considered a type of *systemic fluoride* and are available by prescription for those who do not have fluoridated drinking water.



Fluoride is an important element in keeping your teeth— and your smile—healthy.

Is fluoride safe?

YES. Studies conducted for more than 65 years have consistently shown that fluoride is safe and very effective at preventing tooth decay in both adults and children. The American Dental Association, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry, among dozens of other groups, all support the benefits of fluoride in reducing tooth decay.



How else can cavities be avoided?

Brushing twice a day with a fluoridated toothpaste, flossing, and visiting your dentist regularly can help in preventing cavities. In conjunction with the benefits of fluoride, limiting sugary snacks and sugary drinks, such as soda and juice, is also an important step in maintaining good oral health—and reducing tooth decay.



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For more information on fluoride, call **(800) 342-8747**, or visit **www.massdental.org**.