

## FACTS ABOUT FLUORIDE

**Fluoride isn't just for children. Everyone should have fluoride every day. Fluoride does not only benefit children.** Twenty years ago, dentists thought that fluoride worked mainly by strengthening developing teeth before they entered the mouth, which meant that young children were the main focus of fluoridation efforts. Now, research has shown that topical fluoride, including toothpastes, mouth rinses and fluoride treatments, is probably just as important in fighting tooth decay in all teeth. Some adults think they're naturally going to get cavities or lose their teeth, as they get older. They don't have to. Although everyone should use fluoride every day, some adults are at higher risk for and might need more intensive supplementation. To find out if you might be one of them, ask yourself these questions:

### **1. Am I taking any medications that cause my mouth to become dry? Do I have a disease that causes dry mouth?**

Many adults take medications that can cause dry mouth, or xerostomia. Many common medications have this side effect, including allergy medications, antihistamines, anti-anxiety agents and antihypertensives. Some diseases, most notably Sjögren's syndrome and diabetes also can cause dry mouth. Without saliva, you're more susceptible to cavities. Saliva also contains many minerals, including fluoride, that help keep your teeth decay-free. If you are experiencing dry mouth, try using a fluoride mouthwash to lubricate your mouth and protect your teeth. Salivary substitutes are also available at the pharmacy and many people use them to replace the saliva they have lost. Also Don't stop taking your medication! Drink more water, use sugarless candy if you have to and use fluoride daily.

### **2. Have my gums receded so more of my teeth show or has my dentist told me I have periodontal (gum) disease?**

By the time you're an adult, you've probably had some form of periodontal, which can cause your gums to recede and exposes more of your teeth. This gives bacteria more room to roam and makes you particularly susceptible to cavities in the roots of your teeth. For example, more than half of adults over age 75 have had root decay. If your dentist has treated you for periodontal disease, your gums may have been reshaped and your tooth roots exposed, which also can lead to decay. To protect your teeth's roots, your dentist can paint a fluoride varnish or gel on them, and you can use a fluoride mouthwash or a prescription fluoride gel to get more fluoride.

### **3. Have I needed a filling in the past year?**

If you've had recent tooth decay you're at risk for more. If you're the type of person who tends to get one filling a year or one every other year, something's going on and you need extra fluoride.

#### **4. Do I have crowned teeth and/or bridges?**

Crowned teeth are not safe from cavities. As long as some natural tooth remains, you're at risk. If you have a crown or a crown-and-bridge restoration, the area where the crown meets the tooth is at risk for decay and you need fluoride.

#### **5. Am I wearing dental braces?**

Many teenagers and adults wear orthodontic appliances. They trap a lot of bacteria and it's hard to brush that off. People can get cavities around the brackets, so we recommend fluoride mouthwashes and gels to remineralize the teeth.

#### **6. Am I receiving, or have I received, radiation therapy to the head and neck?**

Adults receiving radiation therapy to the head and neck are at very high risk of tooth decay because the radiation damages their salivary glands, causing dry mouth. Saliva fights tooth decay so people suffering from dry mouth are at higher risk for decay. We clean patients' teeth before radiation and give them extra fluoride.

### **What To Do**

Regardless of risk, all adults should use fluoride toothpaste. **If you think you are at high risk for decay, ask about receiving fluoride treatments in the dental office.** During a treatment, your dentist or dental hygienist will dry off your teeth and either paint a gel on them or put a gel or foam into mouth guards that are placed in your mouth for one to four minutes. You can also receive a varnish or gel on the roots of your teeth. You'll be asked not to eat or drink anything and to avoid smoking for 30 minutes after the treatment. Dental-office fluoride treatments provide fluoride at high levels of 9,000 parts per million to 20,000 parts per million, depending on the type. You can also give yourself a fluoride treatment at home every day. The fluoride in these treatments—which are usually prescription gels—ranges from 1,000 parts per million to 5,000 parts per million. Your dentist or dental hygienist can prescribe these treatments based on your particular needs and risks for dental decay. Ultimately, talk to your dental office to determine your risk for dental decay. Dentists and dental hygienists will prescribe fluoride products in combination with good oral hygiene habits, control of snacking and dietary carbohydrates and use of antimicrobial products to reduce the chance of new decay. Adults should feel confident that dental problems do not have to be a part of aging. Using fluoride and other preventive programs can ensure that adults keep their teeth healthy as they age.

**North Arlington Dental Care is now offering in-office adult fluoride treatments. The cost is \$15.00 per treatment and is not usually covered by insurance. We recommend that all adults receive at least one fluoride treatment per year. Patients that are in certain “*high risk*” categories may need more frequent treatments. It is our goal to do everything possible to help our patients have healthy teeth for life.**