



Five Holiday Treats That May Harm Teeth

Northeast Delta Dental advises consumers to eat smart during the holiday season.

The proverb “too much of a good thing” never rings more true than during the holiday season. There tends to be an overabundance of everything—especially sweet treats. While it is unrealistic to suggest complete avoidance of holiday goodies, Northeast Delta Dental encourages moderation to make sure you receive the gift of great oral health!

Here are five common treats to limit during the holidays:

Candy canes: The problem with candy canes is the prolonged amount of time that they linger as you slowly dissolve them in your mouth. Not to mention the temptation to chomp them, which can lead to cracks or chips in your teeth. Consume them quickly and carefully to limit their negative oral health impact.

Holiday cookies: It is tempting to overindulge when there is an abundance of baked goods—like holiday cookies—laying around. But cookies are laden with sugar and can do significant damage to your pearly whites. Of course, we know skipping cookies entirely is nearly impossible, so we won’t even suggest it. Just enjoy them in moderation.

Holiday drinks (such as eggnog, apple cider and hot chocolate): Festive beverages offer more than warm, holiday cheer—eggnog boasts more than 20 grams of sugar per cup,¹ while hot cider can pack more than 65 grams of sugar when dressed with caramel sauce and whipped cream.² Stick to one small serving of your favorite drink and wash away some of the sticky sugar residue with a glass of water.

Caramels: Chewy, sticky treats such as grandma’s famous homemade caramels are particularly damaging because they are

not only high in sugar, but they spend a prolonged amount of time stuck to teeth and are more difficult for saliva to break down. The same rule applies to all those sparkly gumdrops on your gingerbread house.

Fruitcake: Even though it is the brunt of many holiday jokes, some people actually eat the fruitcake that gets passed around at the holidays. Try to avoid eating the fruitcake because of the sugary cake base and the chewy, candied fruit that is baked in.

Cookies, candy and sweet holiday beverages all have at least one main ingredient in common: sugar. Sugar’s negative effect on teeth has been well documented. Why is sugar so bad for your teeth? It mixes with bacteria in the sticky plaque that constantly forms on teeth to produce acid that attacks tooth enamel. The stickiness of that plaque keeps those harmful acids against the teeth, which contributes to tooth decay.

“Try to enjoy holiday treats in moderation, and if you find yourself overindulging, perhaps spend some extra time flossing and brushing at least twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste,” said Shannon Mills, DDS, Vice President for Professional Relations and Science at Northeast Delta Dental.

When you do indulge your holiday sweet tooth, it is best to enjoy goodies as part of, or immediately following, a meal, rather than snacking on treats throughout the day. Another good tip is to stick to one small serving of your favorite drink or snack and to follow up by swishing some water in your mouth. Chew sugar-free gum, or brush soon after finishing to wash away some of the sticky sugar residue.

¹ USDA. Basic Food Report: Eggnog. <http://nutritiondata.self.com/facts/dairy-and-egg-products/55/2>

² MyFitnessPal. <http://www.myfitnesspal.com/food/calories/starbucks-grande-caramel-apple-spice-cider-with-whip-61966862>.