

Hydration, Saliva, and Why Water Protects Your Teeth

By Joy of Dentistry Health Desk · 6 min read

Saliva has an image problem. We notice it mainly when there's too little of it or when it shows up at an awkward moment, and almost never think of it as doing a job. Yet it is one of the hardest-working fluids in the body — a constant, quiet maintenance system for your teeth and gums. And its performance depends in part on something entirely within your control: whether you're drinking enough water.

What saliva actually does

Saliva is far more than water. It carries minerals, proteins, enzymes, and buffering compounds, and it runs several defences at once:

- **It neutralises acid.** After you eat or drink something acidic, the mouth becomes more acidic and enamel begins to lose minerals. Saliva's buffering action helps bring the pH back toward neutral.
- **It helps repair enamel.** Saliva is rich in calcium and phosphate. During the recovery window after an acid exposure, those minerals can redeposit into enamel in a process called remineralisation.
- **It rinses and clears.** A steady flow washes away food debris and dilutes sugars that feed bacteria.
- **It lubricates and protects tissue.** Saliva keeps the soft tissues comfortable and supports chewing, swallowing, and speaking.

When saliva flow drops, every one of those defences weakens at once. That is why a persistently dry mouth is more than an inconvenience — it changes the environment your teeth live in.

Where hydration comes in

Saliva is roughly 99 per cent water, so overall hydration is one input into how much your glands can produce. When you are well behind on fluids — after exercise, a long flight, a day of coffee and little else, or simply forgetting to drink — many people notice their mouth feels drier and stickier.

Hydration is not the only factor. Saliva flow is also shaped by medications, certain health conditions, age, breathing through the mouth, and the time of day — flow naturally falls at night, which is part of why overnight is a vulnerable window for teeth. Drinking water won't override every one of those influences, but it supports the system and costs nothing to get right.

Why water is the friendliest drink for teeth

Among everything you might reach for, plain water is the one drink that asks nothing of your enamel. It has no sugar for bacteria to ferment, essentially no acidity, and no pigment to stain. It also does active good: a drink of water after a meal helps rinse away debris and dilute acids while your saliva gets to work.

In much of Ontario, tap water is also fluoridated, which supports enamel through the same remineralisation process that saliva drives. Choosing water over a sweetened or acidic drink, even some of the time, reduces the number of daily acid exposures your teeth have to recover from. That running total matters more than any single drink.

Simple ways to support saliva and stay hydrated

- **Keep water within reach.** A bottle on the desk or in the car makes sipping through the day automatic rather than something you have to remember.
- **Rinse after coffee, juice, or anything sweet.** A quick swish of water helps clear sugar and dilute acid between brushings.
- **Finish meals with water.** It supports the natural clearing that follows eating.
- **Chew to stimulate flow.** Sugar-free gum, ideally one containing xylitol, prompts saliva and is a handy option when you can't brush after lunch.
- **Mind the mouth-breathing.** Habitual breathing through the mouth, especially overnight, dries the tissues. If you wake with a parched mouth most mornings, it is worth mentioning.

Supporting saliva is really a branch of everyday prevention, and it fits naturally alongside the brushing, flossing, and regular check-ups that make up [preventive care](#). A dental team can spot early signs of dryness, erosion, or decay before they become uncomfortable and tailor advice to your situation.

When dryness is more than being thirsty

Occasional dryness after a workout or a salty meal is normal and resolves once you rehydrate. A mouth that feels persistently dry — day after day, regardless of how much you drink — is a different matter and shouldn't simply be waited out. Ongoing dryness has a range of possible

contributors, from medications to health conditions, and because reduced saliva raises the risk of decay and gum problems, it is worth having assessed. A dentist can examine the cause, suggest ways to protect your teeth in the meantime, and coordinate with your physician where needed. Individual cases differ, and an in-person assessment is the right way to get specific guidance.

Frequently asked questions

Why is saliva so important for my teeth?

Saliva neutralises acid, supplies the calcium and phosphate that help repair enamel, rinses away food and sugar, and keeps the soft tissues comfortable. When saliva flow drops, all of those protections weaken together, which is why a dry mouth raises the risk of decay and gum problems.

Does drinking water actually help my teeth?

Yes, in a few ways. Water helps rinse away debris and dilute acids after eating, it supports the fluid volume your salivary glands draw on, and — unlike sweetened or acidic drinks — it adds no sugar, acid, or stain. In many areas the tap water is also fluoridated, which further supports enamel.

Is sparkling or flavoured water as good as plain water?

Plain water is the gentlest choice. Plain carbonated water is only mildly acidic, but flavoured or citrus-infused versions can be more acidic, so they are better with a meal than sipped continuously through the day.

Sources & further reading

- [Canadian Dental Association — Your Oral Health](#) — information on daily prevention and keeping teeth and gums healthy.
- [Government of Canada — Your Oral Health](#) — public health guidance on oral care and fluoride.
- [Ontario Dental Association](#) — patient resources and finding care in Ontario.