

# Dental caries (tooth decay)

## Dietary habits

There has been a major rise in the consumption of sugars and processed, fermentable carbohydrates (starches) provides fuel for cavity-causing bacteria.

## High-Frequency Snacking ("Grazing")

Frequent eating throughout the day prevents teeth from recovering from acid attacks, as the mouth rarely has time to neutralise, leading to constant demineralisation.

## Lifestyle & Pandemic Effects

Changes in routines, such as working from home, have led to increased snacking frequency. Furthermore, temporary closures of dental surgeries during the pandemic caused lapses in preventative care.

## Poor Oral Hygiene

Inadequate brushing and flossing allow plaque, a sticky film of bacteria, acids, and food particles to remain on teeth, weakening the enamel.



## Dental caries

Dental caries (tooth decay) cases have risen the UK from 28% to 41% since 2009 taking us back to 1998 levels, this is due to increased consumption of sugary foods and drinks, poor oral hygiene, and limited access to professional dental care.

Tooth extractions in English NHS hospitals for children (0–19) rose 14% to 56,143 in 2024–25, with over 33,900 driven by preventable decay, an 11% increase. This means a child has a tooth extracted every 15 minutes

Key drivers include frequent snacking (grazing), inadequate exposure to fluoridated water or toothpaste, and lifestyle changes that increase exposure to acid-producing bacteria.

Limited access to dental care services, particularly for vulnerable populations, means decay often goes untreated and progresses.

Bacteria in the mouth feed on sugar and produce acids that dissolve tooth enamel (demineralisation). If the saliva cannot remineralise the tooth fast enough, this leads to decay.

