

## BENEFITS OF DENTAL FLUORIDE



### How Can Dental Fluoride Help Protect Teeth From Decay?

Dental fluoride combines with the minerals in your teeth to form a stronger, more acid resistant enamel. When the acids produced by plaque on your teeth start to break down the minerals in your tooth enamel, a process called demineralization begins. Demineralization starts by weakening the enamel and leads to small cavities at first, but can progress into large areas of decay and eventual tooth loss. The very early stage of demineralization can be reversed by remineralizing the enamel. This can occur by introducing dental fluoride into the enamel.

There are two ways that fluoride works to protect tooth enamel – **systemically** and **topically**.

Systemically, fluoride works when teeth are developing in babies and children – replacing some of the crystals in developing enamel with more decay resistant crystals containing fluoride. Systemic fluoride is ingested in fluoridated water, foods or supplements prescribed by a dentist or pediatrician. These systemic sources of fluoride help to assure that a child's teeth come in strong and decay resistant.

Topical fluoride is contained in fluoride toothpaste and fluoride mouthwash and work from the outside of the tooth when you brush and rinse. Topical fluoride treatments can also be administered at your dental office, less frequently and in higher concentrations. When you use topical fluoride daily at home, in low concentrations, you can remineralize weakened enamel and strengthen the structure of your enamel. It's important to brush thoroughly twice a day and rinse daily with fluoride containing products that have been clinically proven to prevent tooth decay. Fluoride toothpastes and mouthwashes should be used throughout your life. Talk to your child's dentist about how to help them brush with very small amounts of fluoride toothpaste until they are old enough to spit rather than ingest the toothpaste.

### Other Ways That Dental Fluoride Can Help Prevent Cavities

Saliva contains a very low level of fluoride as a result of drinking fluoridated water and using products with fluoride and can therefore help with remineralization as it bathes the teeth – in addition to acting as a natural method for cleansing the teeth.

Besides remineralizing teeth systemically and topically, fluoride also helps prevent cavities by affecting the bacteria in plaque, making it less able to produce the acids that cause decay.