

# Are You at Risk for Tooth Decay?



**Tooth decay is one of the most common diseases affecting adults in the United States.** A variety of factors put people at a greater risk for tooth decay, but the three most important are: 1) how much bacteria accumulates on the surface of your teeth, 2) how frequently the bacteria comes in contact with refined carbohydrates such as sugar, and 3) the strength or hardness of your tooth enamel. When bacteria and refined carbohydrates combine, the resulting acid can harm your tooth enamel.

**The following questions may help you determine if you are at higher risk for tooth decay:**

		POINTS
Do you use a toothpaste that contains fluoride?	If NO, circle	12
Do you drink beverages that contain sugar or do you add sugar to drinks such as coffee or tea more than three times a day?	If YES, circle	12
Have you had more than two new cavities in the last three years?	If YES, circle	14
Do you snack on candy or other sugary foods more than twice a day?	If YES, circle	12
Have you lost a tooth in the last three years due to decay?	If YES, circle	12
Do you brush your teeth less than twice a day?	If YES, circle	8
Does the water you drink and cook with contain fluoride?	If NO, circle	8
Do you have your teeth cleaned at least once a year by a dentist or a dental hygienist?	If NO, circle	7
Do you take any medicine that makes your mouth dry or is your mouth dry as a result of radiation therapy or some other condition?	If YES, circle	7
Do you clean between your teeth with dental floss or an interproximal brush at least once a day?	If NO, circle	6
Is it uncomfortable to brush areas where your gums have receded?	If YES, circle	4

**Now, total up your points**

**You should see your dentist and discuss your self-assessment.**

If your score is 30 points or more you may be at higher risk for tooth decay. The best way to help prevent tooth decay is to brush with a toothpaste containing fluoride, floss daily, avoid beverages and snacks that contain refined sugar and have regular professional cleanings and periodic evaluations by your dentist.

**More information on tooth decay is available** from the American Dental Association at [www.ada.org](http://www.ada.org), Academy of General Dentistry at [www.agd.org](http://www.agd.org), the National Institutes of Health Consensus Development Conference Statement on Diagnosis and Management of Dental Caries at [http://consensus.nih.gov/cons/115/115\\_statement.htm](http://consensus.nih.gov/cons/115/115_statement.htm), Merck Manual of Medical Information - Home Edition at [www.merckhomeedition.com](http://www.merckhomeedition.com) or by writing MetLife Quality Initiatives Program, 501 US Highway 22, Area 3N35A, Bridgewater, New Jersey 08807 or [dentalquality@MetLife.com](mailto:dentalquality@MetLife.com).

Please be advised that the information contained in this guideline is intended for general knowledge only and is not a substitute for dental or medical advice for this or any other specific dental or medical condition, or other advice from dentists or doctors.

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