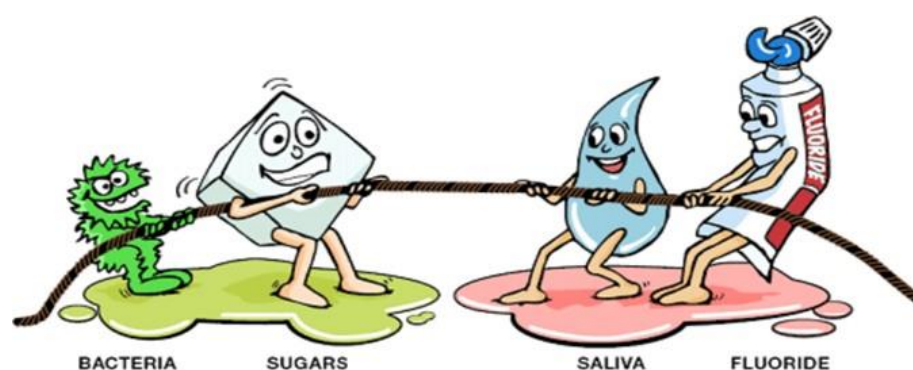




# What goes on inside our mouths all day?

Throughout the day, a tug of war takes place inside our mouths.



On one team are dental plaque—sticky, colorless film of bacteria—plus foods and drinks that contain sugar or starch (such as milk, bread, cookies, candy, soda, juice, and many others). Whenever we eat or drink something that contains sugar or starch, the bacteria use them to produce acids. These acids begin to eat away at the tooth's hard outer surface, or enamel. On the other team are the minerals in our saliva (such as calcium and phosphate) plus fluoride from toothpaste, water, and other sources. This team helps enamel repair itself by replacing minerals lost during an "acid attack." Our teeth go through this natural process of losing minerals and regaining minerals all day long.

## How does a cavity develop?

When a tooth is exposed to acid frequently - for example, if you eat or drink often, especially foods or drinks containing sugar and starches - the repeated cycles of acid attacks cause the enamel to continue to lose minerals. A white spot may appear where minerals have been lost. This is a sign of early decay. Tooth decay can be stopped or reversed at this point. Enamel can repair itself by using minerals from saliva, and fluoride from toothpaste or other sources. But if the tooth decay process continues, more minerals are lost. Over time, the enamel is weakened and destroyed, forming a cavity. A cavity is permanent damage that a dentist has to repair with a filling.

How can we help teeth win the tug of war and avoid a cavity?

Use fluoride. Fluoride is a mineral that can prevent tooth decay from progressing. It can even reverse, or stop, early tooth decay. Fluoride works to protect teeth. It prevents mineral loss in tooth enamel and replaces lost minerals and reduces the ability of bacteria to make acid.

# Vocabulary:

What goes on inside our mouths all day?

**Starch:** almidón

**Cavity:** caries

**Enamel:** esmalte

**Lose:** perder

**Weakened:** debilitado

**Filling:** amalgama/empaste

**Tooth:** diente

**Teeth:** dentadura