DENTAL CARIES (CAVITIES)

What Is It?

All age groups are susceptible to dental caries. Your risk is dependent upon the presence of bacteria (biofilm), dietary habits, amount of saliva and ability to do effective oral care. Dental hygienists are preventive specialists and can help determine your risk of caries with a thorough assessment at recare visits.

Risk Factors

Dental biofilm: Biofilm is a dense, complex mass containing many types of microorganisms. Many factors influence the accumulation of biofilm.

Tooth structure: Exposed root surfaces are not protected by enamel, which protects the crown portion of the teeth, and are therefore more susceptible to caries. Also, caries can reoccur around the margins of existing fillings and crowns.

Diet: Caries activity is influenced by the total amount, consistency and frequency of foods containing carbohydrates (sugars and starches) like milk, carbonated beverages, sticky foods like raisins, cakes and candies. Bacteria in the mouth thrive on these foods and produce acids that over time demineralize or break down the tooth surface resulting in caries.

Xerostomia (dry mouth): Absent or reduced salivary flow results in loss of buffering capacity and can raise the oral environment to be more acidic.

Oral self care: Inability to perform effective brushing and interdental cleaning, to remove biofilm, due to physical or mental limitations.

For more information about dental caries, other oral health issues, and preventive care, please ask your registered dental hygienist and visit: www.nydh.org

Treatment and Management

Fluoride: Can reduce caries by helping to prevent demineralization and aid in remineralizing tooth structure. Considerations of the type of fluoride and combination of in-office and at-home therapies requires an assessment of caries risk by the dental team and then an appropriate recommendation can be made. Examples of fluoride:

- Twice a day tooth brushing with an over-the-counter fluoride toothpaste and/or daily fluoride mouth rinse
- Daily tooth brushing with a prescription strength fluoride toothpaste or gel
- In-office fluoride treatments: fluoride varnish or fluoride trays.

Diet: Decreasing the amount of sugars and fermentable carbohydrates is effective in lowering caries risk. Incorporate sugar-free candies/gums/drinks. Xylitol, a non-carcinogenic sweetener, has been proven to reduce biofilm formation and neutralize plaque acids.

Oral Hygiene: Daily removal of biofilm with tooth brushing and interdental cleaning with floss or other aids. Cleaning oral appliances like dentures and night guards with brushing and/or specific denture cleansers.

Dental Hygiene Recare: Assess for new caries, demineralized areas of tooth and re-evaluate caries risk, based on changes in your medications, diet and/or lifestyle.