

FLUORIDE AND BOTTLED WATER

Over the years, the benefits of fluoride for your teeth have been well documented. Fluoride is a naturally occurring mineral that is found universally in all types of water sources. It is also found in soil, air and in most foods. Fluoride is very effective in preventing and reversing early signs of decay and has dramatically decreased the rate of tooth decay over the past thirty years.

Fluoride is easily absorbed into the enamel and hardens the surface of the tooth. It acts like a shield to prevent the acids of bacterial plaque from attacking the tooth. It is the constant acid attacks on the enamel that causes cavities. Fluoride can also repair and reverse early decay by helping to remineralize the tooth structure, and has been shown to help reduce tooth sensitivity. Because of these reasons, it is very important to be aware of whether or not you are getting enough fluoride from your choice of drinking water.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention has said that fluoridating community water is one of the greatest public health achievements in the last century. But are we really getting the fluoride we think we are? The Food and Drug Administration requires the fluoride content to be listed on the labels of bottled water only if it has been added. (Information on bottled water can be obtained from the International Bottled Water Association).

Most bottled waters do not contain the optimal levels of fluoride, or may not contain fluoride at all. Bottled water or home tap water that is purified by distillation, reverse osmosis, filtration or ozonation can also remove fluoride from the water. If you drink a lot of bottled or purified water, you may not be getting the full benefits that fluoride can provide, unless you obtain them in other forms.

There are two ways you can get fluoride. One form is systemic, in which it is ingested into the body. In addition to drinking water, systemic fluorides come in the form of dietary supplements, such as fluoride tablets and vitamins. Because systemic fluorides are ingested, they are important for the developing tooth as the fluoride is incorporated into the tooth making it more resistant to decay.

The second form is topical applications of fluoride. These include toothpastes, fluoride mouth rinses and professionally placed fluorides applied at a dental cleaning appointment. The constant bathing of the teeth with saliva (which contains systemic fluoride) also adds a topical effect of fluoride. Since the average adult still develops about one new cavity a year, fluoride is as important for adults as it is for children. The effects of fluoride on much older patients can be extremely beneficial, since, for a variety of reasons there is a spike in dental decay as one ages.

Over the past decades systemic as well as topical applications of fluoride have been proven cavity fighters. An important source of systemic fluoride has been from community fluoridated water. If the way you or your family consumes water has

changed, you may not be getting enough fluoride and should consider additional fluoride alternatives.