



Each day, your teeth are attacked by millions of bacteria. They form a clear coating on your teeth called plaque. When you eat, they eat too, gobbling up sugar and making acids that burn holes in your teeth. You can taste the acid that bacteria make about an hour after you have eaten something sweet. The acid tastes sour. The best way to prevent plaque is to brush for two minutes at least two times a day using toothpaste and a toothbrush.

Your teeth have three main layers. Enamel covers the outside, dentin is in the middle, and pulp is on the inside. Enamel only covers the part of your tooth that sticks out of your gums, called the “crown”. The part below your gumline is the “root”.

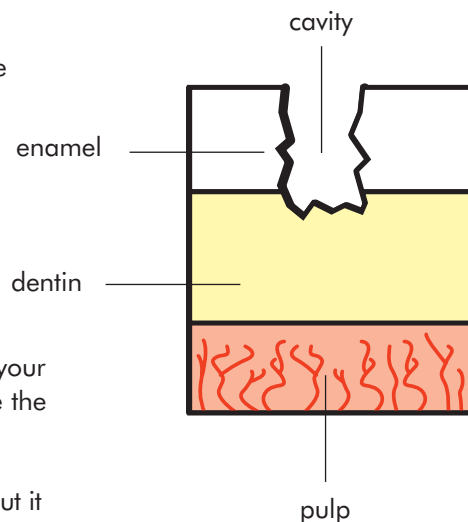
Enamel is the hardest material in your body, and that’s a good thing considering what you eat. Chewing food is a tough job, so your teeth must have enamel to protect them. Dentin makes up most of your tooth. It is also hard and bony, but not as hard as

enamel. It protects the nerves and blood vessels in your tooth’s pulp.

When bacteria eat through the enamel on your teeth, they form cavities. Cavities are bad, because they give bacteria a place to hide. Inside of the cavity, bacteria will continue to eat and to make acid that burns its way even deeper into your teeth. If a cavity gets deep enough into your tooth, it will begin to hurt because the nerves in your tooth pulp will be exposed.

Dentists can fix most cavities, but it is not an easy process. First, they drill away the rotten part of your tooth. Then they can fill the hole left behind. The ceramic material used to fill the hole in your tooth is like glass: it is hard like your enamel, but it can break easily. So, it is best to avoid cavities when you can.

Most toothpaste has fluoride, a chemical that hardens your tooth enamel. Your drinking water may also have fluoride in it. Using fluoride helps



to prevent cavities by making it harder for acids to burn through your teeth.

Preventing cavities by brushing for two minutes at least twice a day with toothpaste and a toothbrush is a good way to make sure that you will still have your teeth when you are older. It will also give you something to smile about.

