


## Fluoride Action Network

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 [fluoridealert.org/new-visitors/teeth/](https://fluoridealert.org/new-visitors/teeth/)

### Do we need fluoride?

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Short Answer: No.

Long Answer: In the 1950s, dentists believed that fluoride was a “nutrient.” A nutrient is a vitamin or mineral that is necessary for good health. In the case of fluoride, dentists believed that ingesting fluoride during childhood was necessary for the development of strong, healthy teeth, and that a “fluoride deficiency” would cause cavities, just like a deficiency of vitamin C can cause scurvy. This belief was mistaken. It is now known that fluoride is not a nutrient and that the fluoride content of a tooth has little bearing on whether that tooth will develop a cavity. People can have perfect teeth, therefore, without consuming fluoridated water or fluoride toothpaste.

### Is fluoride good for teeth?

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Short Answer: Not when swallowed.

Long Answer: Back in the 1950s, when fluoride was believed to be a “nutrient,” dentists believed fluoride needed to be swallowed to be most effective at preventing cavities. That is why fluoride was added to things that people swallow: water and prescription pills (fluoride supplements). Today, however, dental researchers overwhelmingly agree that fluoride’s main benefit to teeth (whatever that may be) comes from topical application, not ingestion. Even if one believes that fluoride is good for teeth, therefore, there is no need to swallow it.

This helps explain why countries that do not fluoridate water (most western nations) have tooth decay rates that are just as low as the few western nations that do fluoridate water. Similarly, most researchers now concede that swallowing fluoride supplements is not an effective way to prevent cavities. Adding fluoride to water or pills is neither necessary, nor effective.

### Are topical fluorides good for teeth?

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Short Answer: Yes, but they can also damage teeth as well.

Long Answer: Credible research suggests that topical fluorides can provide a benefit to teeth. This benefit, however, must be weighed against the risks, which include damage to the teeth. Although topical fluoride products like toothpaste are not meant to be swallowed, studies show that young children swallow a lot of the paste that is put on the

brush — particularly when the toothpaste has a bubble-gum or watermelon flavor. Swallowing toothpaste can cause health complications, including a disfiguring defect of the teeth called dental fluorosis.

## What is dental fluorosis?

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Dental fluorosis is a discoloration of teeth caused by too much fluoride ingestion during childhood. Fluorosis stains are generally cloudy white splotches and streaks, but children who swallow too much toothpaste can develop the more advanced forms of fluorosis, which are marked by brown and black stains and enamel erosion. When present on the front teeth, fluorosis can cause significant anxiety and embarrassment for the child, and may require cosmetic treatment, which can be costly.

Recent research, including the largest dental survey ever done in the U.S. and an ongoing NIH-funded study have reported data showing that fluoridated water, and overall fluoride intake from all sources, is far more likely to cause dental fluorosis than it is to reduce a cavity. Thus, although fluorosis was once a rarity, the latest national survey in the U.S. found that 41% of adolescents now have some form of the condition.