Dental caries is a preventable disease, yet it is still a major health problem in most western countries. In Ireland, half of all 12 year olds and three-quarters of all 15 year olds have had decay in their permanent teeth. While the causes of dental caries are multi-factorial, there is overwhelming evidence that sugars in food and beverages are the main dietary cause of caries in children and adults. The consequences can include pain, infection, absenteeism and an impact on self-esteem. For children there can also be a negative effect on the permanent dentition, growth and development, and specialist or hospital treatment may be required.

Oral health is vital to overall general health, and chronic diseases such as obesity, cardiovascular disease, diabetes and dental caries have common risk factors. As a diet high in sugary, energy-dense foods is a common aetiological factor for some chronic diseases, a common risk factor approach in their prevention has been suggested by the WHO.

Irish Dental Association’s position

The Association:
- supports measures aimed at promoting a healthy lifestyle, especially those concerned with encouraging healthy eating habits based on the food pyramid, increasing physical activity and improving access to oral healthcare;
- particularly supports any measures that result in a reduction in the frequency of consumption of sugary foods and drinks, which are the most important dietary cause of dental caries and dental erosion. These measures should also be directed towards increasing public awareness of the oral and general health risks associated with excessive frequency of consumption of dietary sugar, clearer labelling of foods and appropriate marketing of high energy/sugary foods and drinks;
- calls on all healthcare providers and interested parties, including Government, parents, schools, the food industry, the FSAI and the HSE to co-operate and foster relationships aimed at improving the oral and related general health of the population;
- encourages all members to support this position in their efforts to communicate with the public and while providing oral health education for their patients;
- feels that branches should support the continuing education of members by providing regular scientific updates on diet and oral and general health; and,
- encourages all members to promote public awareness of the link between diet, oral health and general health.

References