



# Fluoride, a natural solution

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**Does “nature” contain all the** necessary pieces to make us healthy, long-lived and happy? Maybe. The truth of

the statement will not come easily, but one part we can vouch for: Nature provides the fluorides that prevent our teeth from decaying. That’s one for ‘nature,’ then.

Fluorides are chemical compounds found throughout our environment. They are released by weathering and other means, and are naturally occurring in air, water, soil and most foods. Fluoride is also added to community water supplies to spread its benefits.

Fluoride protects tooth enamel against the acids that cause decay. Credible and extensive research over the past 60 years has shown that fluoride not only reduces cavities in children and adults, it also helps repair the early stages of tooth decay even before the decay is visible.

The fluoride we are exposed to comes in two forms: topical and systemic. The first is found in toothpaste, mouthwash and gels or pastes applied in the dental office. Systemic fluorides are those that we ingest including in our water. Systemic fluorides are integrated into a child’s teeth as their tooth structures form. The best results against tooth decay are achieved when fluoride is available in both ways, something water fluoridation does very well.

While there is some confusion and misinformation arising out of junk science and poorly informed sources about community water fluoridation, the truth is much simpler. So obvious have been the benefits and safety of adding fluorides to our drinking water that the process is endorsed worldwide by health authorities such as Health Canada, the Canadian and

American Dental Associations, the World Health Organization—the list goes on. Indeed, the Centres for Disease Control (CDC) have identified community water fluoridation as one of the 20th Century’s greatest public health achievements.

Adding fluoride to drinking water is much the same as fortifying salt with iodine; milk with vitamin D; and orange juice with vitamin C. Minute amounts of a substance are added to improve the health advantages of the product. How minute? Optimal levels for drinking water are in the 0.7 to 1.2 parts per million. How much is that? One part per million would be the same as one inch in 16 miles! Or how about one minute in two years?

Under certain circumstances, we can be overexposed to fluorides. While not likely, guarding against it is important, especially for young children. Overexposure can occur from eating toothpaste or swallowing mouthwash that contains fluorides. Should it occur, it can result in damaging tooth enamel during as teeth

structures are formed. That means monitoring how your child uses those products.

A related issue arises for people whose main source of drinking water comes from commercial bottles. Most bottled

water, if it contains fluorides at all, does not contain optimal levels. Caution is therefore suggested. Talk to your dentist if this describes you.

Investing a dollar in water fluoridation saves many dollars in dentals costs (to say nothing of extra visits to the dentist) in the future. Indeed, it is a wonderful public health achievement.

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