

**Clean Plates , Contributor**

Clean Plates provides engaging, actionable, delicious healthy content that focuses on clean food for the body, mind, soul and planet. Through authoritative experts, yummy recipes, and mouth-watering videos, we provide accessible ways to make feeling and looking good simple and fun.

# No Toothbrush? Eat One of These Foods

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Let's say you're at the office or having drinks with friends, and you eat something garlicky or drink something mouth-staining (cough—red wine—cough cough), but

you don't have a toothbrush handy. No worries: Chew on one of these 6 items to freshen breath, whiten teeth, and get rid of plaque buildup and stains.

You still need to brush and floss regularly, of course—the below are meant as good temporary fixes for when you're on the go.

## **CRUNCHY PRODUCE**

Celery, carrots, apples, leafy greens like kale and spinach, and other high-fiber raw fruits and vegetables act like a toothbrush to help clean the teeth as we chew on them, says Liz Weinandy, registered dietician at The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center.

“Eating these foods raw is best because the fiber in the foods acts like a brush to help scrub away particles of food stuck to the teeth,” she adds.

## **WATERMELON**

Cooling, hydrating watermelon is refreshing and versatile –and it turns out it's also a booster for healthy teeth and gums, says Dr. Gary Glassman, D.D.S.

Here's why: “Vitamin C helps has been shown to be an essential vitamin for healthy teeth and gums and in preventing periodontitis, and watermelon packs 25% of your required daily value,” he says.

Watermelon is also high in antioxidants like lycopene, which can prevent cell damage by neutralizing free radicals that can weaken teeth, he adds.

## **CHEESE**

We don't need any arm-twisting to eat cheese —but research shows that full-fat dairy products, such as yogurt, milk, and especially hard cheeses, can prevent tooth decay and cavities, as well as reduce plaque formation.

Lactic acid and proteins found in dairy bind to teeth to remove plaque buildup and kill the bacteria that cause tooth decay, says Glassman. And it can help regulate the mouth's pH level.

“When a person's pH level is less than 5.5, they have a greater risk for tooth decay, which eats away at the tooth's enamel. Likewise, when a person's pH level

is greater than 5.5, their chances of developing a tooth cavity is lessened,” Glassman explains.

“Dairy is also loaded with calcium, which guards and strengthens bones that hold your teeth in place. And hard cheeses increase saliva production to help remove food particles that stain,” Glassman says.

## **PINEAPPLE**

If you like something sweet and refreshing after a meal, pineapple is a great choice, since it also may help boost your dental health.

Pineapple is high in bromelain , an enzyme that’s both anti-inflammatory and antibacterial, says Dr. Edward A Alvarez , a New York City-based dentist.

“Those two qualities will help fight gum inflammation and gum disease, as well as break down the plaque that accumulates on your teeth, which causes gum inflammation and tooth yellowing,” he says. “It’s so effective that it’s been included in tooth whitening toothpastes. But the best way to get it naturally is by eating pineapple.”

## **AVOCADO**

Is there anything avocados can’t do? Along with making great toast, these green wonders are high in potassium , which has been linked to improved dental health, Alvarez notes.

“Potassium is essential in the density of bones and teeth, and the denser your bones are, the stronger your gums will be, and the less likelihood of decay or fracture,” he says.

Potassium also works to help prevent your blood from becoming too acidic, which would cause your body to pull calcium from your teeth and bones and weaken them, he adds. Other potassium rich foods include bananas, beets, sweet potatoes, almonds and spinach.

## **XYLITOL GUM**

Although technically not a food, gum containing xylitol can help remove plaque from teeth and freshen breath, says Weinandy.

“Xylitol, a sugar alcohol, helps to promote a more neutral pH in the mouth and thus prevent bacteria from forming plaque on teeth,” she says. Gum and mints in general also get your saliva flowing, which is good for cleaning the mouth.

Many people tolerate xylitol well, but some people do experience stomach upset from it. The sugar alcohols can pull water into the intestine or get fermented by gut bacteria, which can lead to gas, bloating, and diarrhea, says Glassman. That usually happens when people have 30 to 40 grams of xylitol a day. Instead, stick with 6 to 8 grams daily to fight cavities after meals and snacks, he advises. (Check the label of your xylitol gum; we found a few brands with 1 gram per piece of gum.)

***BIO: Isadora Baum is a writer and content marketer, as well as a certified health coach. She's written for Bustle, Men's Health, Extra Crispy, Clean Plates, Shape, and Huffington Post.***

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