

# Benefits Spotlight

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## The Best Farmer's Market Foods for Your Teeth (and a Few to Avoid)

As the temperatures rise, farmer's markets are springing up across Iowa. While some market staples are excellent choices for your teeth, others aren't so much. Keep these oral health picks in mind as you head out to support local growers and markets.

### Top Farmer's Market Picks for Dental Health

*Fill your basket with this bounty of tooth-friendly market fare.*

1. **Low-acid produce like apples, carrots and cucumbers:** Acid is your tooth enamel's worst enemy, so these low-acid fruits and veggies are great picks. Plus, many of these foods have high water content, which your saliva needs to ward off excess bacteria.
2. **Dark, leafy greens:** A bunch of leafy greens like spinach, kale and collard greens is one of the healthiest things you can take home from the farmer's market. Greens contain a spectrum of nutrients, including calcium, that support strong oral health.
3. **Shiitake mushrooms:** Does your local farmer's market feature special varieties of mushrooms? If so, swing by and pick up some shiitake mushrooms, which contain a nutrient called lentinan. Lentinan helps prevent the cavity-forming bacteria that causes gingivitis.
4. **Nuts:** If you're looking for a healthy snack at the market, check out the specialty nut roasters or growers. All varieties of nuts are packed with protein, but almonds and Brazil nuts have extra calcium content for your teeth.
5. **Cheese, milk and other dairy products:** Farm-fresh cheese, yogurt and dairy are some of the most delicious Iowa farmer's market staples—and they are all great for your oral health. Dairy is loaded with teeth-strengthening calcium, and it's low in acid.

### Farmer's Market Finds that May Damage Teeth

*Many of the foods below are packed with health benefits, but they can damage your teeth when eaten in excess.*

1. **High-acid produce like lemons, limes, strawberries and grapes:** High-acid foods—like sugary ones—can wear down your tooth enamel and make you susceptible to cavities. But because these foods have several healthy nutrients, you don't need to avoid them entirely. Limit eating them to one daily sitting as opposed to snacking on them throughout the day to minimize the effects on your teeth.

- 2. Blueberries:** Want to keep your pearly whites sparkling bright? You may want to avoid eating handfuls of blueberries. Though the blueberry is one of nature's super foods, its violet hue can stain your tooth enamel.
- 3. Sticky candies like caramel and toffee:** It's hard to resist the sugary scent swirling around vendors making fresh confections at the market, but it's best to avoid super sticky candies like caramel and toffee. These sweets stick to your teeth and aren't easily washed away by a swish of water. Because they stay on your teeth longer, the bacteria in your mouth has more time to turn them into enamel-eating acid. Opt for dark chocolate instead—it's lower in sugar and won't stick to your teeth like caramel.

*One final tip:* Bring a bottle of water with you to the market. Snacking on prepared foods at the farmer's market is a delicious part of the experience. Sipping on water throughout your shopping excursion will help keep your mouth clean between bites.

### Sources

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## 3 Sweet Swaps for Smile-friendly Baked Goods

With graduation parties and weddings filling up the calendar, this time of year is jam packed with celebrations featuring tempting baked goods. Whether you're baking for a big gathering or giving treats away as gifts, these simple swaps will transform your homemade sweets into teeth-friendly delights.

### **Baking Swap #1: Substitute a nut flour for white flour.**

Nut-based flours, like almond flour or coconut flour, contain more protein and fewer carbs than white flour, so they break down into sugar slower. Start substituting in small increments. For example: Coconut flour absorbs more liquids, so use 1/4 cup coconut flour to replace 1/2 cup white flour. Increase your liquids by 1/4 cup to make up the difference.

### **Baking Swap #2: Use dark chocolate instead of milk chocolate or other candies.**

Dark chocolate has less sugar than milk chocolate, so it's a better choice. Also, avoid using sticky inclusions, such as dried fruits or caramel, which are harder to rinse from your teeth. Include nuts instead, which contain fiber and healthful nutrients.

### **Baking Swap #3: Try mascarpone or whipped cream for frosting.**

What's a graduation party or wedding without a cake or cupcakes? While the best way to make your baked good smile-friendly is to leave frosting off entirely, some treats can't do without it. If frosting is an essential component, apply a thin layer of frosting and use mascarpone or whipped cream. These options have less sugar than other frostings.

Another great tip is to brush or swish some water around your mouth after eating a sweet treat. This will rinse the sugar away from your teeth, which will prevent the bacteria in your mouth from turning it into enamel-eroding acid.

Graduation and wedding season is a time to celebrate—and what's a party without some delicious sweet treats? There's no need to cut the occasional baked good from your diet, and these swaps make it even easier to indulge.