

# Benefits Spotlight

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## Mouth-friendly Holiday Party Picks

Holidays are a time to celebrate amid trays of endless finger foods, casseroles and candy platters. While many hope to avoid weight gain, it's also important to consider how these festive foods affect your oral health.

Fortunately, many holiday favorites are actually good for your teeth. Here's a look at our top picks for mouth-friendly fare to enjoy this season.

### The Cheese Plate Is on the Menu

You don't need to steer clear of holiday cheese platters—in fact, cheese is a healthful food for your mouth. Cheese contains calcium, which helps keep your teeth strong. Cheese and other dairy sources (like milk) also stimulate saliva production, which has a host of oral health benefits—from preventing bad breath to warding off tooth decay. It also packs protein—not only does that strengthen tooth enamel but also helps you avoid over-indulging at the buffet table.



### Your Teeth Love Turkey

Speaking of protein, piling up on the season's signature meat—turkey—is a smart move for oral health. Turkey is an excellent source of lean protein, which helps strengthen your teeth without the added fat and calories.

### Not All Nuts Are Created Equal

Roasted nuts are a holiday classic, and they are rich in protein for your teeth. But some nuts are far better choices for your teeth. The top three picks are raw or roasted walnuts, almonds and cashews—they contain the best nutrient mix for your mouth. Though the warm sweet smell is enticing, avoid sugar-roasted nuts that cover your teeth in a sticky coating.

### Seasonal Fruits: Cranberries, Pears and Pumpkin

Some of the most festive winter fruits boast big benefits for your mouth. Take cranberries, for instance, which may prevent bacteria from sticking on teeth. Another seasonal favorite—pears—are full of fiber and increase saliva production.

Pumpkin is another produce powerhouse for oral health: It contains nutrients like zinc, vitamins A and C, and magnesium to help keep your mouth strong, clean, and healthy. But before you load up on cranberry sauce, sugar-soaked pears or pumpkin pie, remember that these items contain a lot of added sugar, which negate the oral health benefits of the produce. Look for ways to enjoy the fruits without loads of added sugar, or enjoy them as a dessert in moderation.

### **Cutting a Sweet Deal**

No holiday gathering is complete without trays of cut-out cookies, gooey candies and minty candy canes. Candy and holidays just go together—so avoiding desserts altogether may make you feel like you're missing out. If you want to pick the best sweet for your teeth, choose solid chocolate. Dark chocolate is a particularly good choice because it contains less sugar than milk chocolate (the higher the cacao percentage, the lower the sugar). Solid chocolate also leaves your mouth quickly, whereas caramel and hard candies (including candy canes and peanut brittle) stick to your teeth.

### **A Final Tip Your Teeth Will Love**

The holidays are the most spirited time of the year, and it's important to enjoy yourself with your loved ones. If you want to keep your oral health in check but don't want to fret over every snacking slip, keep a tooth care kit in your purse or car. If you can brush and/or floss after your meal, you'll go a long way toward protecting your mouth. And if you don't have your toothbrush handy, swishing water around your mouth will help clear away food and bacteria.

With these tips in mind, you'll enjoy all the festivities this season has to offer—and you'll smile bright knowing that your oral health is in tip-top shape for the new year.

### **Sources**

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## **Readers Ask, Dr. Jeff Answers: To Remove or Not to Remove Wisdom Teeth?**

***“Hi, Dr. Jeff—My daughter’s wisdom teeth are coming in, but they’re not bothering her. Do wisdom teeth have to be removed if they’re not causing any problems?”***

Most young people get their wisdom teeth between the ages of 17 and 21, and the decision to remove them isn't always clear. As with any procedure, you should discuss the risks and benefits as they relate to you (or your daughter, in this case). Your dental provider is the best source of this information, as he or she knows your child's oral health history.

One of the general benefits of getting wisdom teeth removed early is cost. Even if a child doesn't have pain or disease associated with their wisdom teeth, many parents choose to have the teeth removed because the child is covered under their dental insurance. Having wisdom teeth removed prior to losing coverage can save a substantial amount of money.

Even though you mention your daughter isn't bothered by her wisdom teeth, don't wait to schedule an appointment with her dentist if pain does start. When wisdom teeth come in, they may cause pain, damage to nearby teeth and infection. In some cases, the teeth will be unable to erupt into the mouth (that is, they won't be able to push past the gums).

For these reasons, many people opt to have their wisdom teeth removed before they cause these problems. However, there's no guarantee that these complications will occur—and your daughter may never need to have her wisdom teeth removed.

Asking your dentist to explain why wisdom teeth removal is (or isn't) important at this juncture—along with sharing your concerns—will help you come to the right conclusion for your daughter.

And if your conversations aren't providing you enough information to make an informed decision about your daughter's wisdom teeth, you are welcome to seek a second opinion to get perspective from a different dental provider

***Dr. Jeffrey Chaffin is the Dental Director for Delta Dental of Iowa. Have a question you'd like Dr. Jeff to answer? Send it his way at [healthy@delatadentalia.com](mailto:healthy@delatadentalia.com), and it could be featured in an upcoming issue!***