Dental Caries

You have dental caries, or cavities. These are areas of tooth decay. Cavities are usually caused by a combination of poor dental care, sugar, exposure to tobacco and alcohol, and receding gums. If cavities are not treated by a dentist, they grow in size. This can cause toothaches, infection, and loss of the tooth. The outer tooth enamel is very hard, but the dentin beneath it is softer, so decay can spread more rapidly to the inner pulp and nerve tissue if the enamel is damaged.

Cavities of the enamel do not cause symptoms. Dental pain from cold drinks may be the first sign the enamel has broken down and decay begins to spread toward the root of the tooth. This can cause the tooth to die or become infected. **If a cavity is treated before it causes toothache, the tooth can usually be saved**. Cavities can be prevented by good oral hygiene. Brushing your teeth in the morning and before bed, and using dental floss once daily helps remove plaque and reduce bacteria.

Candy, soft drinks, and other sources of sugar promote tooth decay by promoting the growth of bacteria in the mouth. Proper diet, fluoride, dental cleaning, and fillings are important in preventing the loss of teeth from decay. **Antibiotics, root canal treatment, or dental extraction may be needed if the decay is severe.**

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