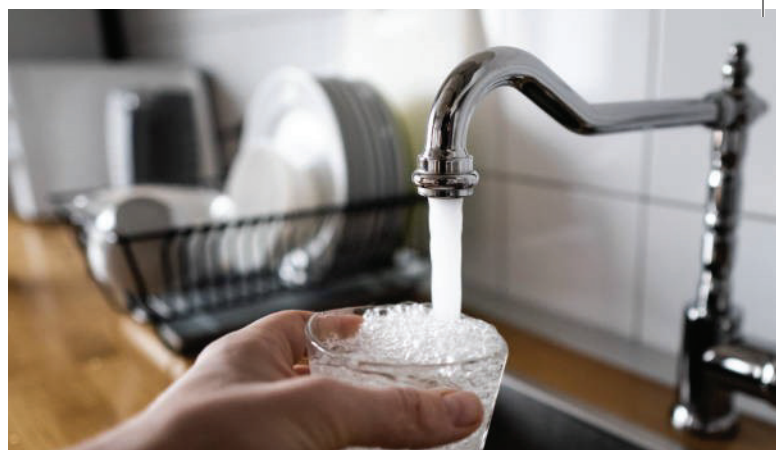


Some Health Perspectives on Flouride



Fluoride, a naturally occurring mineral, has sparked considerable debate in the field of dentistry. A quick search for the “negative effects of fluoride in water” reveals a wide range of opinions, from legitimate scientific studies to freedom-of-choice arguments and conspiracy theories.

Despite this controversy, U.S. health organizations continue to support water fluoridation, and for a good reason: Caries disease (tooth decay) is the most prevalent disease affecting humans worldwide, affecting 20% of all 2-year-olds, 84% of school-age children, and 91% of adults. As long as sugar consumption continues to rise, tooth decay will remain a persistent issue, and fluoride has proven to be a significant tool in reducing that risk.

Truthfully, I wish we didn’t need to add anything to our drinking water. I wish we would focus on reducing our processed food consumption; but realistically, when will that happen? Furthermore, over 400 commonly used medications reduce saliva flow, leading to dry mouth and a higher risk of tooth decay. As a total-health dentist for people of all ages, I assure you there is a HUGE health benefit from keeping your teeth intact for your lifetime. So, as I advocate for fluoride, please don’t shoot me if you’re on the other side of this controversy.

In my extensive review of the literature on systemic fluoride, I have not encountered enough credible evidence to suggest health risks from consumption outweigh the overwhelming scientific support for its tooth-protective benefits.

Fluoride protects teeth in two primary ways: First, from the inside by integrating into developing enamel as a building block for lifelong protection (the benefit of systemic fluoride); and second, by strengthening the outer surface of the enamel after a tooth has already formed and erupted (topical fluoride).

The story of fluoride’s role in dental health began in the early 20th century when a dentist in Colorado Springs noticed that many of his patients had stained, brown teeth but were remarkably resistant to decay. This condition, later known as dental fluorosis, was traced back to high levels of natural fluoride in the local water supply. In the 1930s and 1940s, studies confirmed that low levels of fluoride significantly reduced the incidence of dental caries, leading to the first practice of water fluoridation in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in 1945.

While municipal water fluoridation originally helped decrease U.S. tooth decay rates, it also shifted our focus away from addressing the root cause — our rising sugar consumption. These debates continue today, yet affirming studies have persisted. The consensus among health organizations, including the American Dental Association (ADA) and the World Health Organization (WHO), is that fluoride, in controlled amounts, is both safe and effective in helping prevent tooth decay.

Systemic fluoride refers to fluoride ingested and incorporated into developing teeth before they erupt through the gums. This process occurs when drinking fluoridated water, taking fluoride supplements, or consuming food and drinks prepared with fluoridated water.

This protection is important during childhood, particularly from infancy through adolescence, when teeth are still forming beneath the gums. For those without access to municipal water, fluoride supplements can be prescribed for children, but proper dosing and monitoring are crucial to avoid the risk of dental fluorosis.

Topical fluoride, on the other hand, is applied directly to the surface of the tooth, benefiting people of all ages. It strengthens existing enamel and is available in various forms, including toothpaste, mouth rinses, gels, and varnishes applied by dental professionals. I continue to recommend daily use of fluoridated toothpaste and, for cavity-prone people, a professionally applied fluoride varnish at three- to six-month intervals.

I support my fluoride-free families and extra-encourage them with the same advice I give everyone: Aim for a no-added-sugar household. If you missed the news, the WHO has asked us to decrease our sugar by 75% to affront metabolic disease rates (e.g., diabetes) and caries disease. When you ratchet down your sugar consumption, you ratchet up your overall health!



Dr. Susan Maples is a dentist in Holt. She is also a speaker, health educator and author of “BlabberMouth! 77 Secrets Only Your Mouth Can Tell You to Live a Healthier, Happier, Sexier Life” and “Brave Parent: Raising Healthy, Happy Kids (Against All Odds) in Today’s World.” Reach her at Susan@DrSusanMaples.com.



Total Health Dentistry
Susan Maples, DDS | Tracey Epley, DMD

Total-Health-Dentistry.com
517-694-0353