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## **Types Of Tooth Decay**

**Occlusal decay:** Decay that develops on the biting or chewing surface in the pits and fissures of the back teeth. Pits and fissures are tiny grooves and channels on the biting surface of teeth that contain recesses that can trap bacteria and prevent those bacteria from being removed by your toothbrush (think of the nooks and crannies in an English muffin). The bacteria, in the presence of sugars, will produce acid and then decay starts forming deep in these grooves. It can then spread widely along the base of the enamel to attack the next layer of the tooth, called the dentin.

**Root decay:** Also known as cervical decay. This decay develops on the neck of the tooth, which is not the enamel but softer root structure (dentin) near or below the gum line.

**Smooth surface decay:** Decay that develops on the smooth flat enamel surfaces of teeth (not the chewing surfaces). It can form on the outside or inside facing surfaces of a tooth but most likely on the surfaces where teeth touch each other, called interproximal surfaces. Because this location between teeth is difficult to see, identifying these areas of decay early is best achieved with an x-ray (Bitewing). For the outside and inside surfaces, small white spots will develop first on the tooth as the bacteria starts to dissolve the calcium out of the enamel. These are called areas of decalcification.

**Recurrent decay:** Also known as a secondary cavity. This type of decay develops around previously placed restorations (fillings and crowns).

**Incipient decay: ???**

## **Occlusal Decay**

(NEED GRAPHIC)

Decay that develops on the biting or chewing surface in the pits and fissures of the back teeth. Pits and fissures are thin areas of enamel that contain recesses that can trap food and plaque to form a cavity. The cavity starts small and then spreads widely to attack the next layer of the tooth called the dentin.

## **Root Decay**

(NEED GRAPHIC)

Also known as cervical decay. This decay develops on the neck of the tooth or root surface near or below the gum line.

## Smooth Surface Decay

(NEED GRAPHIC)

Decay that develops on the smooth flat surfaces of teeth. Cavities can form on the front and back of teeth or in-between. Most often due to their location these cavities cannot be seen with an x-ray (Bitewing). Small white spots may develop on the tooth as the bacteria start to break down the calcium in the enamel.

## **Recurrent Decay:**

(NEED GRAPHIC)

Also known as secondary cavity. This type of decay develops in an area that has been previously treated or restored with a dental restoration.

## Incipient Tooth Decay: White Spot Lesions



Early decay or incipient decay is the first sign of tooth destruction. This type of decay is caused by demineralization, or breakdown of the enamel. This loss of mineral content results in a visible change in the appearance of the tooth. The tooth starts to lose its gloss and shine.

The decay presents as an opaque, chalky white spot on the enamel.

Incipient decay is often seen where dental plaque has been allowed to accumulate. It is most commonly along the gum line of the tooth.

At this stage, the weakened area of the tooth can be fixed with the help of minerals in saliva and fluoride therapy. Routine use of fluoride will help strengthen the enamel and prevent future white spot lesions.

For prevention, it is important to maintain a daily homecare routine. Brushing with fluoridated toothpaste and flossing daily can be enough to stop the progression of tooth decay. Use of a powered toothbrush may also be helpful, especially in children and teens.

Additional fluoride treatments provided in the dental office can also help reverse tooth decay before a cavity is formed. A fluoride varnish or gel treatment may be recommended, along with the use of prescription strength high concentration fluoride toothpaste or use of an at-home custom fluoride tray.