

DEFINITION

1. **Dental caries** means decay of the teeth.

CLINICAL MANIFESTATIONS

2. In its early stages dental caries is asymptomatic and may only be found during a routine dental inspection.
3. The condition presents with toothache, which is made worse by hot or cold food or drinks. The pain is throbbing in nature and becomes progressively worse, possibly radiating to the face or ear. Without relief, the pain becomes excruciating and the tooth becomes tender to bite on.
4. Dental caries may lead to an abscess or cellulitis. If the progress of the caries is less acute, it may be followed by chronic pulpitis, granuloma or a cyst round the apex of the tooth.

AETIOLOGY

5. This is probably the most common disease in man, being virtually ubiquitous. It develops mainly in children and young adults.
6. The condition is caused by aggregations of bacteria on the tooth surface, usually referred to as **dental plaque**, resulting from poor dental hygiene. Its development requires two factors -
7. The presence of cariogenic bacteria that are capable of rapidly producing acid below the critical pH required for dissolving enamel. The organisms responsible are a group of oral streptococci collectively designated as *Streptococcus mutans*, which can produce caries in the absence of any other organism.
8. Dietary carbohydrates, which favour colonisation of these bacteria.

CONCLUSION

9. **Dental caries** is an extremely common affection of the teeth resulting from a combination of poor dental hygiene and residual dietary carbohydrate lingering on the teeth.

REFERENCES

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