



AUSTRALIAN DENTAL
ASSOCIATION INC.

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DRINKS AND DENTAL DECAY

Today's consumers are spoilt for choice when it comes to the range of drinks and beverages available. What people don't realise is there are a number of beverages that can have an adverse effect on oral health, particularly if copious amounts are consumed.

SOFT DRINKS AND SPORTS DRINKS

Most people are aware that soft drinks are a major culprit due to the significant amount of sugar (a 600ml bottle can contain up to 13 teaspoons of sugar) but not many realise that sports drinks also contain high levels of sugar.

Both sports and soft drinks also have high acid levels which are another factor that can potentially damage teeth.

A study published in a 1997 issue of the British Journal of Sports Medicine found eight brands of sports drinks showed pH levels ranged from 4.46 to 2.38. A low pH level means a beverage is acidic and the lower the pH the more acidic the product. Damage can start to occur when the pH drops below 5.5. Acids can gradually erode enamel from teeth leading to loss of the tooth's natural shape, or premature exposure of the dentine, which can make a tooth sensitive – especially when exposed to heat and cold.

The National Health and Medical Research Council says acidic drinks such as citrus-based and other juices, carbonated and uncarbonated drinks, sports drinks and herbal teas are likely to exacerbate dental erosion. (Dietary Guidelines for Children and Adolescents in Australia).

Another study carried out by researchers at the University of Melbourne (reported in the Australian Dental Journal in September 2002) showed damage to tooth enamel by acid erosion was reported by 25-45% of those surveyed.

BOTTLED WATER

Bottled water is another drink which people may not realise has an effect on oral health. Increased consumption, particularly by children may put them at greater risk of tooth decay.

This is because they are not consuming as much fluoridated tap water. Fluoride in drinking water has been essential to ensuring strong and healthy teeth for generations of people.

If fluoridated tap water is unavailable then bottled water is still a better alternative than juice, cordial, sports drinks, carbonated or uncarbonated drinks.

KEYS TO MAINTAINING GOOD ORAL HEALTH

Enjoying food and drinks is part of living a balanced life, and it isn't necessary to cut out these drinks altogether.

Instead, there are some key things people can do to ensure that while they are enjoying their choice of beverages, they are still maintaining their oral health:

- Avoid holding or 'swishing' soft drinks or sports drinks around the mouth as this increases the likelihood of dental decay and enamel erosion
- Use a straw where possible as this minimises exposure of the beverage to teeth
- Try to drink chilled soft drinks and sports drinks as cooler temperatures have been shown to be less likely to encourage tooth erosion
- Drink fluoridated tap water as much as possible. Try to follow consumption of a soft drink or sports drink with a glass of water as it helps with saliva flow and helps wash the sugars and acids from such drinks away. Increased saliva flow can assist with neutralising acid from bacteria and protect teeth.

Also, make sure you maintain a routine of brushing with fluoride toothpaste at least twice a day after meals, flossing and visiting the dentist regularly.

For more information about ADA Dental Health Week, for interview and/or feature and pictorial opportunities with an ADA spokesperson, please contact Porter Novelli Melbourne:

Sarah Harvie – Phone: (03) 9289 9555, Mobile: 0402 217 956
Email: sharvie@porternovelli.com.au

Patrick McClelland – Phone: (03) 9289 9555, Mobile: 0409 499 419
Email: pmcclelland@porternovelli.com.au

ADA: www.ada.org.au

