

THE TRUTH ABOUT BLACK COLA DRINKS AND DENTAL HEALTH

The Australian Dental Association (ADA) is amazed and very disappointed that the Advertising Standards Bureau has given the recent Coca-Cola advertisement on 'Myth Busting' starring Kerry Armstrong the all-clear on the basis the actress does not push excessive consumption of the soft drink and recommends brushing teeth after drinking it.

The Federal President of the ADA, Dr Neil Hewson said, "The Advertising Standards Bureau has completely dismissed the complaints made by concerned dentists and public health officials claiming that because the advertisement 'stressed the importance of good dental hygiene', it did not breach industry codes. This is simply unacceptable. Several statements made under 'Myth. It rots your teeth' are ambiguous or just plain wrong."


A paper written by Professor Laurence Walsh, Head of the School of Dentistry at the University of Queensland, which provides an evidence-based approach on assessing the detrimental effects of black cola drinks on oral health can be found on the ADA's website at www.ada.org.au/newsroom/article,documentid,142704.aspx. Professor Walsh states that recent advertising material from companies which manufacture black cola soft drinks such as Coca-Cola should be of concern to all oral health professionals. The positive portrayal of black cola drinks in the advertising is vastly different from the stark reality often encountered in evidence-based clinical practice which shows the grossly adverse impact consumption of such drinks have on oral health.



The positive portrayal of black cola drinks in the media (left) is vastly different to the reality often encountered in clinical practice (right) – a patient who has been consuming 2.5 litres per day for several years.

Professor Walsh's paper states:

- *The high cariogenicity of black cola drinks is recognised by all dental professionals, and follows on from the accepted role of refined carbohydrates, particularly sucrose, in the caries process.¹*
- *When sucrose intake exceeds 15 to 20 kilograms per person per year, such intake is directly associated with increasing caries' prevalence. With a sucrose content typically in the range of 10-12%, a 375 mL can contains in excess of 40 grams of sucrose, thus one can of sugared soft drink per day for one year will in itself account for 15 kilograms of sucrose per year.*
- *Strong associations between high DMFS (decayed missing filled surfaces on teeth) scores and soft drink consumption in persons aged 25 and above have been seen. The interpretation of the findings is self evident – a higher sucrose intake has increased dental caries activity.*
- *Animal models demonstrate that cola drinks cause dental erosion as well as dental caries, leading to "devastation of the dentition."²*
- *There is extensive literature on erosive effects of black cola drinks. Soft drinks, sports drinks and fruit juices are acidic drinks and all have the potential to erode your teeth. While acid is eventually neutralised by saliva, this is not before it softens your precious tooth enamel, allowing it to be worn away much more easily.*
- *Serious problems will occur particularly in people who have dry mouths (caffeine, medications, exercise and certain ailments cause dry mouth).*
- *The problem is magnified when soft drinks are sipped as mouths never have a chance to neutralize the acidic effect.*



Professor Walsh highlights the fact that consumers should avoid brushing teeth where enamel has been softened by exposure to black cola soft drinks as this may cause significant enamel loss due to toothbrush abrasion.

The Advertising Standards Bureau completely missed the point of the submission made by the ADA. To suggest that the advertisement was compliant with regulations because it stated that consumers were advised to brush teeth after consuming such drinks **in fact perpetuates advice that is contrary to the evidence**. As stated by Professor Walsh, brushing teeth after consumption of any acidic drink will result in abrasion and removal of tooth enamel which will directly lead to decay in teeth.

Not only did the advertisement not dispel the myth of the dangers to teeth caused by such drinks, it reinforces conduct that will have an adverse impact on teeth by providing advice contrary to expert evidence-based opinion.

“You have to wonder if the Board appropriately examines these complaints from the perspective of the consumer. The Coca-Cola advertisement makes it harder for conscientious parents to stand up to the inevitable pressures from their children to consume such products. It then goes on to suggest action in brushing teeth at a time that is harmful,” said Dr Hewson.

Tooth decay is a very significant problem affecting millions of people worldwide and it remains a global problem. It is one of the most common and **preventable** diet-related illnesses. There is a responsibility for the advertising and beverage industries to play their part in not promoting and producing products that so significantly contribute to this problem, nor to offer advice that is harmful to health. If these industries do not do so voluntarily then there may be a role for governments to further regulate them.