

PREVENTING TOOTH EROSION

Tooth erosion is a major cause of tooth wear and is a serious dental problem. Tooth erosion is caused by excessive exposure to acidic substances. Teeth have a hard protective coating of enamel that protects the underlying sensitive dentine. Acids temporarily soften the enamel and as a result, some of the mineral particles are dissolved. Eroded teeth can use the minerals in saliva to slowly mend themselves. Fluoride in toothpaste helps this process, but if the acid attack happens too often the enamel starts to wear away.

Erosion attacks the tooth's entire surface and you may not notice it at first. Extensive loss of enamel makes the teeth thin and exposes the dentine. The teeth can then become extra sensitive to hot and cold food and drink. The front teeth are often involved and look glassy, can appear short and can have uneven tips that are easily chipped.

Identify sources of acid

Acid enters the mouth by eating certain foods and drinks or it may come from the stomach. People vary greatly in their susceptibility to apparently similar acid attacks. You need to discover the cause of your problem so that it can be treated.

Sources of acid include:-

- Fizzy drinks, fruit juice, health and sports drinks, herbal drinks, dry wine, cider and beer, fruit tea, lemon in water
- Citrus fruit, vinegar, pickles
- Vitamin C tablets, iron pills, some medicines, industrial chemicals (e.g. chlorine)
- Pregnancy sickness, hiatus hernia, chronic indigestion or 'heartburn', Gastro-oesophageal reflux disease (GORD)
- Vomiting and regurgitation in anorexia and bulimia, or as a result of anxiety or stress

Attend for regular check-ups, to

- Detect the early signs of tooth erosion and prevent further damage
- Record the severity and extent of the erosion and prevent further tooth wear
- Obtain medical advice and treatment for any continual vomiting or indigestion

Reduce the frequency of acid attacks, by

- Limiting acidic drinks or foods
- Choosing neutral drinks for example water or milk
- Avoid sipping and 'swishing' acid drinks around the mouth
- Using a straw to direct drinks to the back of the mouth (so that it misses your teeth)

Protect your enamel, by

- Finishing meals with a small piece of cheese or a drink of milk (both are rich in calcium)
- Sucking an antacid or chewing sugar free gum to neutralise any acid from the stomach
- Brushing your teeth twice a day with a special high fluoride toothpaste, then 'spit', don't rinse'
- Using a fluoride rinse or gel, if recommended, once a day at a time different to brushing

Do not brush your teeth straight after contact with any acid. Simply rinse with water or with a tea spoonful of sodium bicarbonate (soda-bi-car) dissolved in water and wait at least 20 minutes before brushing. More recently Tooth Mousse has been found effective in reducing erosion. Apply on affected teeth 2/3 times a day after meals or brushing.