



AUSTRALIAN DENTAL
ASSOCIATION INC.

TOOTH

EROSION

Fact Sheet

Tooth Erosion in adults & pregnant women

Dental Health Week

Tooth erosion is a 'silent epidemic' and if you are not having regular dental checkups, it can go undetected causing significant damage and discomfort to your teeth.

While most Australian adults today have better oral health than those who came before them and most can expect to keep the majority of their teeth for life, their teeth are at risk of conditions like dental erosion. In adults, tooth erosion is often the result of dietary factors, although a number of influences affect whether a person may be susceptible.

Causes

Diet: Highly acidic foods and beverages attack the surface of the tooth leading to erosion. Acidic foods include vinegars and some salad dressings, pickles and pickled vegetables and citric fruits. Beverages with a high acid level include fruit juices, carbonated beverages, soft and sports drinks, caffeinated drinks, cordial and some alcohol. Many of these drinks are also high in sugar which increases the risk of tooth damage.

Saliva: People who suffer from dry mouth syndrome (also known as xerostomia) are at greater risk of tooth erosion because saliva can assist in 'buffering' against an acid attack on your teeth. Sports people in particular need to avoid dehydration which will cause a decrease in saliva.

Medications: Some medications can have an erosive impact on your teeth either because they cause a dry mouth or are in themselves acidic. These include chewable vitamin tablets, frequent use of aspirin, some iron supplements in liquid form, some cough medicines, some types of asthma medication and some antidepressants.

Internal Acids: Vomiting and reflux expose your teeth to stomach acids, which can lead to erosion.

Time and frequency of acid contact: Tooth erosion is exacerbated by frequent acid contact and the greater the length of time of the contact, the greater the erosive damage. Minimising exposure of your teeth to acids is the best way to minimise tooth erosion.

Preventing or minimising tooth erosion

- Acidic and/or sugary foods and beverages have a role as part of a healthy diet. When consuming them, do so quickly to avoid prolonged exposure to the acids.
- Eating cheese or drinking milk following acidic food or beverages can help to neutralise the acids and protect your teeth.
- Drink acidic and/or sugary beverages through a straw if possible, to minimise the exposure to your teeth. Additionally, drinking water (preferably fluoridated tap water) following an acidic drink can help wash away acids.
- Wait at least an hour before brushing your teeth after consuming acidic foods and beverages. This allows time for the enamel on your teeth to reharden.
- Never stop taking a prescribed medication without consulting with your doctor; however make sure you understand any side effects, and discuss with your dentist the best way to minimise any erosive impact.

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Pregnancy

Pregnant women who experience morning sickness and/or reflux are at greater risk of dental erosion due to the regular exposure of the teeth to stomach acids. If you are pregnant and experiencing these conditions, speak with your doctor or maternal health care professional about ways in which you can minimise vomiting and reflux.

- Preventing damage to your teeth after vomiting or reflux includes getting into the following habits.
- Don't brush your teeth for at least an hour.
- Rinse your mouth with water (preferably fluoridated tap water), which will assist in removing acids.
- Chewing sugar free gum can stimulate saliva flow and rinse acids away.
- Lightly smear fluoride toothpaste on your teeth or rinse with an alcohol free fluoride mouthwash, which will help to provide additional protection against stomach acids.
- Speak to your dentist about other products to protect your teeth during pregnancy.