



Too many soft and sports drinks can harm teeth, dentist warns

Over summer, people should be watching their intake of soft drinks and sports drinks, according to the Australian Dental Association Victorian Branch.

The President of the ADAVB, Dr Suzanne Hanlin, says it is vital to remain adequately hydrated during the summer months and the best way to do this is with water. The amount of soft and sports drinks consumed should be limited.

"Soft drinks often contain a significant amount of sugar – a 600ml bottle can contain up to 13 teaspoons of sugar as well as high acid levels – both of which can potentially damage teeth." Dr Hanlin explains.

"Additionally, sports drinks can also contain significant amounts of sugar as well as high acid levels – both of which can potentially damage teeth."

Studies into regular consumption of sports drinks show that they may lead to dental decay and/or dental erosion because acid levels have been linked to harming tooth enamel.

A study in a 1997 issue of the *British Journal of Sports Medicine* found that analysis of 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. 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 ADAVB encourages healthy eating and drinking and we'd suggest people take note of the sugar and acid levels of the foods and drinks they consume," Dr Hanlin says.

"High sugar and acid drinks should be limited in order to maintain healthy teeth and gums."

The National Health and Medical Research Council says that 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).

While the ADAVB is not telling people to cut these beverages out of their diets completely, the Association recommends limiting consumption and suggests:

- Try not to hold or 'swish' 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 as 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.

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