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From the American Dental Association Oral & Dental Health Basics



Soda or Pop? It's Teeth Trouble by Any Name

It's called "pop" in the Midwest and most of Canada. It's "soda" in the Northeast. And it goes by a well-known brand name in much of the South.

People across North America use different words to identify a sugary, carbonated soft drink. But however they say it, they're talking about something that can cause serious oral health problems.

Soft drinks have emerged as one of the most significant dietary sources of tooth decay, affecting people of all ages. Acids and acidic sugar byproducts in soft drinks soften tooth enamel, contributing to the formation of cavities. In extreme cases, softer enamel combined with improper brushing, grinding of the teeth or other conditions can lead to tooth loss.

Sugar-free drinks, which account for only 14 percent of all soft drink consumption, are less harmful¹. However, they are acidic and potentially can still cause problems.

We're Drinking More and More

Soft drink consumption in the United States has increased dramatically across all demographic groups, especially among children and teenagers. The problem is so severe that health authorities such as the American Academy of Pediatrics have begun sounding the alarm about the dangers.

How many school age children drink soft drinks? Estimates range from one in two to more than four in five consuming at least one soft drink a day. At least one in five kids consumes a minimum of four servings a day.²

Some teenagers drink as many as *12 soft drinks a day*³.

Larger serving sizes make the problem worse. From 6.5 ounces in the 1950s, the typical soft drink had grown to up to 20 ounces by the 1990s.

Children and adolescents aren't the only people at risk. Long-term consumption of soft drinks has a cumulative effect on tooth enamel. As people live longer, more will be likely to experience problems.

What to Do

Children, adolescents and adults can all benefit from reducing the number of soft drinks they consume, as well as from available oral care therapies. Here are some steps you can take:

- Substitute different drinks: Stock the refrigerator with beverages containing less sugar and acid such as water, milk and 100 percent fruit juice. Drink them yourself and encourage your kids to do the same.
- Rinse with water: After consuming a soft drink, flush your mouth with water to remove vestiges of the drink that can prolong exposure of tooth enamel to acids.
- Use fluoride toothpaste and mouth rinse: Fluoride reduces cavities and strengthens tooth enamel, so brush with a fluoride-containing toothpaste such as Colgate® Total®. Rinsing with a fluoride mouthwash also can help. Your dentist can recommend an over-the-counter mouthwash or prescribe a stronger one depending on the severity of the condition. He or she also can prescribe a higher fluoride toothpaste.
- Get professionally applied fluoride treatment: Your dental hygienist can apply fluoride in the form of a foam, gel or rinse.

Soft drinks are hard on your teeth. By reducing the amount you drink, practicing good oral hygiene, and seeking help from your dentist and hygienist, you can counteract their effect and enjoy better oral health.

¹Harnack L, Stang J, Story M. Soft drink consumption among US children and adolescents: Nutritional consequences. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* 1999;99:436-444.

²Gleason P, Suitor C. Children's diets in the mid 1990s: Dietary intake and its relationship with school meal participation. Alexandria, VA: US Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Analysis, Nutrition and Evaluation;2001.

³Brimacombe C. The effect of extensive consumption of soda pop on the permanent dentition: A case report. Northwest Dentistry 2001;80:23-25.

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