

Preventing Tooth Decay from Drinks

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I enjoy my cup of coffee like the majority of the world. Although I've learned through the years to limit myself to two cups most days and move on to water. With our overworked and under-rested modern society, many feel they need coffee just to get their brain going before they can even think about starting their day. However, more people are reaching for energy drinks for a caffeine boost as evident by the millions of dollars in sales raising each year and variety available on the store shelves. What's more troubling though is the amount being consumed with the belief that it's a better choice than coffee or soda.

In the last few years, dentists have seen an increase in cases of tooth decay commonly referred to as "Mountain Dew Mouth". Much like the defamed soda, energy drinks are becoming an all day beverage and wreaking havoc on the dental health of adolescents and adults. Bombarded with advertisements fronted by sports celebrities and marketing- speak promoting the added vitamins, there are many consumers who are unaware of possible health risks from sipping too many energy drinks.

Highly Acidic

Energy drinks, coffee, soda & tea, typically have acidity levels ranging at pH 2.5-3.5. Not only does this erode tooth enamel, but by altering the pH level in the mouth, bacteria flourish. In 2007, General Dentistry published results from an in vitro dissolution of enamel study stating that teeth can be completely dissolved from anything lower than pH 4.0. In addition to low pH, patients often sip rather than chug energy drinks, giving their teeth an acid bath for hours on end.

Loaded with Sugar

The most common notion savvy patients realize about energy drinks is the high sugar content. However, they often think of their waistlines and not their teeth when weighing this fact. After the acid compromises enamel, the massive amount of sugar in each mouthful feeds all the extra bacteria that have been allowed to grow. Again, with constant sipping, teeth remain vulnerable for dental caries. Even diet drinks without sugar support decay with sorbitol & mannitol, sugar alcohols.

Risk of Bone Loss

In their study published by Food Science and Human Nutrition, L.K. Massey and S.J. Whiting found that caffeine increases the urinary excretion of calcium. Even if moderate amounts of caffeine are consumed, the loss of calcium can raise the risk of osteoporosis. Bones and teeth suffer when patients are calcium deficient. Second in size only to sales, energy drinks are packaged in bigger and bigger cans indicating a demand by consumers. Habitual consumption of these large portions could be detrimental to bone health.

Dry Mouth

Caffeine is a natural diuretic. Instead of quenching your thirst, the highly caffeinated energy drinks actually dehydrate you. When it comes to dental health, dehydration increases the likelihood of tooth decay, gum disease, and halitosis (bad breath). Recently the International Journal of Sports Medicine reported that athletes are at high risk for erosion and caries due to dehydration from physical activity, mouth breathing, and frequent use of energy drinks. Extra dental visits to assess the risk and receive regular cleanings are recommended for sporty patients.

Preventing Tooth Decay from Energy Drinks

Of course, a healthy diet, sleep, and lots of water are more satisfactory sources of energy, but the occasional energy drink in a crunch is safe. As important as it is to be aware of the health risks, it's good to know how to avoid painful and costly restorations by remembering a few simple rules.

Limit intake of energy drinks. Think 1-2 per week, not per day.

Drink within 5-10 minutes instead of sipping for hours.

Rinse mouth with water after finishing energy drink.

Use a straw to keep beverage away from teeth while drinking.

Chew sugar-free gum with xylitol to help produce protective saliva.

Brush teeth to make sure enamel isn't further damaged.

Call or email us if you have any questions or to schedule your appointment.

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To your health,

Dr. Sandy Schwartz & Team