

Dental Erosion

Erosion is the loss of tooth enamel caused by acid attack and is becoming increasingly more common in the population.

Erosion usually shows up as hollows in the teeth and a general wearing away of the tooth surface and biting edges. This can expose the dentine underneath, which is a darker, yellower colour than the enamel. Because the dentine is sensitive your teeth can also be more sensitive to hot, cold or sweet foods and drinks. Because plaque bacteria are not involved in the process, dental erosion affects patients even if they have excellent oral hygiene.



What are the common effects

Every time you eat or drink anything acidic, the enamel on your teeth becomes softer for a short while, and loses some of its mineral content. Your saliva will slowly neutralise this acidity in your mouth and restore it to its natural balance. However, if this acid attack happens too often, the mouth does not have a chance to repair itself and tiny particles of enamel can be brushed away. Over time, you would start to lose the surface of your teeth.

Causes of Acid Erosion

Acidic foods and drinks such as fruit and fruit juices, particularly citric ones including lemon and orange, can be particularly harmful to teeth. Fruit juices and fruits contain natural acids, which can be just as harmful to teeth. Fizzy drinks are also a cause of enamel erosion. It is important to remember that even the *diet* brands are still as harmful. Even flavoured fizzy waters can have an effect if taken in large amounts, as they contain certain acids which can harm the teeth. Pickled foods also have erosive potential due to their high concentration of acid. Wine and vinegars can also cause acid erosion.

It is important to have acidic foods and drinks at mealtimes only.

Healthy foods such as fruit and fruit juices are not always the best options for teeth if you have too much of them. It is also recommended that you do not brush your teeth for at least one hour after eating or drinking anything acidic, so that your teeth can build up their mineral content again. Regurgitation of stomach acids may also cause erosion. Conditions such as hiatus hernia, Bulimia and excessive alcohol intake may therefore cause erosion.

Tooth brushing immediately after food or drink can cause erosive enamel loss.

Prevention

- Limit acidic products and fizzy drinks to mealtimes to reduce the number of acid attacks on your teeth.
- Drinks should be drunk quickly without holding in or 'swishing' around your mouth. Or use a straw to help drinks go to the back of your mouth and avoid long contact with your teeth.
- Finish a meal with cheese or milk as this will help neutralise the acid. Chew **sugar-free gum** after eating to help produce more saliva to help cancel out the acids which form in your mouth after eating.
- Wait for at least one hour after eating or drinking anything acidic before brushing your teeth. This gives your teeth time to build up their mineral content again.
- Brush your teeth twice a day with a small-headed brush with medium to soft bristles and fluoride toothpaste.
- Avoid "Whitening" toothpastes that may be more abrasive than regular toothpastes.

COST

You should be provided with an estimate of cost before you commence treatment. Should any additional work become necessary due to unforeseen circumstances your dentist will advise you of this and any additional costs at the time.

Treatment

The best treatment is early diagnosis and preventative treatment. Removing the cause and brushing twice daily with a fluoride toothpaste is all that is required most of the time. Newer products such as "**Tooth Mousse**" and "Proenamel" may offer a degree of protection from erosion of permanent enamel.

Dental erosion does not always need to be treated. With regular check ups your dentist can prevent the problem getting any worse and the erosion going any further. In other cases it is important to protect the tooth and the dentine underneath to prevent sensitivity. In these cases, simply bonding a filling onto the tooth will be enough to repair it. However, in more severe cases the dentist may need to fit a veneer.

