

Smile Talk with Kimmy...



A patient was in our office recently for a routine cleaning. She was so excited because she had been very diligent about brushing and flossing and was confident she would have a great check up. Unfortunately, she felt discouraged with three new cavities! What was wrong? Well we examined her diet, specifically what she drank, and after a brief discussion, my patient admitted her main drink of choice is soft drinks!

The American Dental Association defines a “soft drink” as a beverage that contains sugar and/or carbonation and/or acidic products. This includes regular or diet sodas, zero calorie water, juice drinks, sports drinks, bottled lemonade and canned iced tea. Americans drank more than 55 gallons of soft drinks per person last year, surpassing all other beverages including milk, beer, coffee and water. One of every four beverages consumed in America today is a soft drink. It is clear that soft drinks have displaced other nutritious beverages and foods from the diet. Soft drinks decay teeth in two ways. First, when the bacteria that are always present in our mouth come in contact with the sugar in regular sodas, an acid is produced that continues to attack teeth for 20 minutes or more. Most soft drinks contain phosphoric acid and citric acid; these can dissolve tooth enamel and result in erosion of the tooth’s surface. Finally, the minerals in carbonated soft drinks can erode enamel, discoloring it, while also making teeth more vulnerable to bacteria.

There are several preventive measure that can be taken to decrease the harmful effects of soft drinks. Of course, water is always the best choice, but if you must drink a soda, root beer is less harmful. Diet root beer carries the distinction of being the least destructive soft drink. Using a straw reduces the amount of liquid that comes into direct contact with teeth. Drinking sodas and other sugary drinks at meal times rather than continuous sipping is also helpful. A popular saying at our office is “Sip all day, get decay!” Avoid brushing immediately after an acidic beverage or meal because that increases the erosion of enamel. Fluoride is an excellent way to reverse the damage of soft drinks; your dentist can recommend an appropriate one for your situation.

The next time you open your refrigerator, step up to a drink machine or order at a restaurant, choose wisely! You don’t have to take care of all of your teeth, just the ones you want to keep!

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*The Smile
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