

“Gator Mouth”

What every Parent and Patient needs to know about “Sports Drinks”
Or my opinions after three decades of experience, practice, research, and teaching

Time to hold up on those “Sports Drinks”, coaches, educators, and parents.

Several years ago we saw an unfortunate but successful marketing blitz by the soft drink companies that resulted in having soft drink machines available in nearly all schools. Although it was well known that these drinks would replace water, milk, tea, and other more conventional liquids, and thus exposing our children to an increased risk of decay, there was a wholesale rush to share in the financial bonanza created by selling soft drinks on school properties.

Several years after the well hidden fact that the phosphates in soft drinks were affecting the full development of bone, particularly in young women, the truth finally surfaced with the recent result that soft drink companies began to pull all advertising and many “cola” products from schools. Bottom line is that there has been an increase in stress fractures in young women that has paralleled the rise in popularity of soft drinks. Because full development of bones in women stops at approximately twenty five years of age, if some factor affects the potential for full development of bone, the statistical odds for fractures increases. What may have been a severe blow resulting in a bad bruise may result in a broken bone in affected individuals.

This increased risk of bone fracture is a life long effect. The women substituting soft drinks for healthy drinks will enter adulthood with weaker bones. There are also more potentially serious side effects. The aftermath of broken bones associated with osteoporosis can lead to a shorter life span. When reaching the age associated with fractures that shorten the life span of women, this generation of women may be the first to have shorter life spans than their mothers.

As a result of the rush to eliminate soft drinks, we listened to more marketing hype and succumbed to the now popular “Sports Drinks” or “Energy Drinks” mania, thinking that these drinks actually have beneficial properties. Unfortunately, when one vice is traded for another, there are often other unanticipated and unexpected side effects. While we knew that a tooth dropped into a bottle of Coca-Cola would completely dissolve, we failed to anticipate that the “Sports Drinks” show a much more aggressive dissolution effect on dental enamel than cola drinks. Some studies show up to ten times the amount of enamel removed by the same volume of “Sports Drinks” compared to cola drinks.

We are witnessing this epidemic first hand in our dental practice. In the past it was very rare to see a teenage male with enamel damaged by acid, and now it is often a daily finding. Once the enamel is eroded away, the underlying tooth structure is exposed, and will wear at an alarmingly fast rate. It may take a decade or more to get to this point, but once it happens, the only solution is to place full crowns over the teeth. This can cost as much as \$40,000.

What can be done? First, a somber reality check. Sports drinks, soft drinks, beer, wine, and hard liquor can all be categorized as “Party Drinks”. If a person needs to be rewarded and entertained every time he/she needs rehydration, they are in trouble. Dump the party drinks for more healthy liquids. Historically, previous generations rehydrated with water, milk, or tea. The generations who rehydrated with tea, particularly green tea, live longer.

There is also a catch to green tea, since the marketing companies now have bottled green tea in the drink dispensers. Bottled teas, ea, i.e. Lipton Green Tea, are flavored with citric acid, once again creating an environment that can dissolve tooth enamel.

The solution is going back to the basics. Rehydrate with water, milk, or tea sweetened with artificial sweeteners. Stop the epidemic. There is no risk with these beverages.

Dr. Rainey can be reached @ jtimrainey@tiads.com

Or 361 526 4695

Dr. Rainey maintains a private practice in Refugio, Texas @ 606 Osage

Picture:

Typical “Sports Drink” erosion of the back side of the front teeth. You can see through the thin enamel on the back side. The patient became aware of a problem when it was realized that the weakened edges of the front teeth were chipping away. This was due to the loss of enamel on the back side of the teeth, leaving the front enamel unsupported.

