

JUNK DRINK ALERT: DIET BEVERAGES CAN BE DETRIMENTAL TO YOUR TEETH

Junk drinks can be detrimental to your dental health. Certain segments of the population, primarily women who intake diet sodas and bottled iced tea, are exhibiting a rate of tooth decay that progresses much more quickly than the general population. This decay is seen around the margins of restorations (fillings) and crowns (caps) where the tooth and restorative material meet. The majority of people with this kind of dental breakdown are generally healthy, between the ages of 12-55, and are concerned with their weight.

It is possible that those who indulge in large amounts of mints, chewing gum and other forms of sticky, sweet condiments become susceptible to rampant dental caries. In the absence of this sort of diet, the prime suspect may be diet beverages - soda and artificially sweetened bottled iced tea.

Sugars in foods are converted into acidic by-products by bacteria found primarily in plaque. The acid breaks down the mineral in the tooth enamel. After sufficient exposure the enamel becomes demineralized and eventually cavities form. But it is not necessary that sugar be present for cavities to form. Acidic compounds present in diet beverages can act directly to produce demineralization of enamel in the absence of sugar. What restores balance to this acidification of the oral cavity is saliva, which neutralizes acids and replenishes minerals leached out by acids. Where there is a steady intake of acidic beverages and foods, saliva may not be able to restore tooth enamel quickly enough. Eventually cavities will form in this kind of acidic environment.

Understanding this casual chain of events should not lead you to completely eliminate diet beverages, nor to go back to regular soft drinks. Moderation is the answer. Rinse your mouth with water or drink water after you have ingested diet beverages. Try not to sip the drinks over a prolonged amount of time and allow your teeth to be exposed to acidic chemical reactions longer than necessary. Use fluoridated toothpaste and rinses. In severe cases your dentist may recommend "custom fluoride trays" by which you can apply fluoride to your own teeth on a daily basis. Fluoride acts to inhibit the demineralization of the enamel matrix. And in the earliest stages of decay, reverse cavity formation.

At your next dental visit feel free to discuss with your dentist how weight loss may be accomplished without exposing your teeth to unnecessary risk of decay.