



What Is Dental Erosion?

Dental erosion is the loss of the outside surface of the tooth (enamel) caused by acids. These are different from the acids that cause decay. It can occur alongside other types of tooth wear, such as attrition, which grinds the teeth away, and the two conditions will make each other worse.

Who Gets It?

It is estimated that about a quarter of the population have some erosion of their tooth enamel, particularly on the front teeth, which are most commonly exposed to acids in drinks. Children are particularly at risk as they are the biggest drinkers of soft and fizzy drinks.

What Are The Symptoms?

Mild erosion may be symptomless, but the first sign of erosion may be sensitivity to hot, cold or sweet foods. The tooth may become increasingly painful as the pulp at the centre is affected, and gradually as the enamel dissolves away, the teeth may become shorter and darker in colour.

What Causes It?

Erosion is caused both by acids in foods, drinks and some medicines, and also acids rising up from the stomach and digestive tract due to reflux or frequent vomiting. The acids in the diet most frequently responsible for erosion are those in fruits and fruit juices (especially citrus juices), vinegary foods and carbonated soft and 'sport' drinks. Swishing or holding foods and drinks in the mouth also keep the acids in contact with the teeth for longer than normal and can promote erosion. Some people who work in acidic environments e.g. with lead acid batteries, or wine tasters, may also develop dental erosion.

How Can It Be Treated?

It is important that erosion is treated early to prevent it getting worse. Regular check-ups are vital, as well as raising the issue with your dentist if you are concerned. The dentist will monitor the changes in the teeth and discuss diet and other issues that may be causing the acidity. Changes in eating habits may be enough if the erosion is mild, but restorative treatment may be needed if it is severe.

How Can It Be Prevented?

Prevention is essential, to stop the erosion becoming worse. There are several things you can do:

- * Diet: cut down on acidic foods and drinks, especially fruit-based soft and fizzy drinks. Restrict them to mealtimes when saliva levels are high and help neutralise the acids
- * Use a daily fluoride mouth rinse (make sure it is pH neutral -see manufacturers label)
- * Good oral hygiene. However, DO NOT clean your teeth immediately after a fruit juice or other acidic drink – the teeth are softer following the contact with acid, and brushing them will literally scrub away the surface
- * Drink acid drinks through a straw. This has been found to help some people, because the drink then bypasses the front teeth
- * Children- limit soft and fizzy drinks to mealtimes and encourage them to drink water or milk between meals