

Drink brewed tea to avoid tooth erosion

November 25 2008

Today, the average size soft drink is 20 ounces and contains 17 teaspoons of sugar. More startling is that some citric acids found in fruit drinks are more erosive than hydrochloric or sulfuric acid—which is also known as battery acid. These refined sugars and acids found in soda and citrus juice promote tooth erosion, which wears away the hard part of the teeth, or the enamel. Once tooth enamel is lost, it's gone forever. There is a beverage that does not produce such irreversible results. When deciding between the many options available, the best thing to drink is brewed tea, according to a study in the July/August issue of *General Dentistry*, the clinical, peer-reviewed journal of the Academy of General Dentistry (AGD).

Apart from tasting good, brewed tea has many health benefits. Tea is loaded with natural antioxidants, which are thought to decrease incidence of cancer, cardiovascular disease, and diabetes.

Mohamed A. Bassiouny, DMD, BDS, MSc, PhD, the lead author of the study, compared green and black tea to soda and orange juice in terms of their short- and long-term erosive effect on human teeth. The study found that the erosive effect of tea was similar to that of water, which has no erosive effect. And, when comparing green versus black, he discovered that there is a better option among those as well.

Dr. Bassiouny says that "when we look at tea and read about the benefits, it's amazing—not because green tea is 'the in thing'—but because there are advantages." He adds that much research done overseas, in countries such as Japan and Europe, found that green tea was identified to being

superior over black due to its natural flavonoids (plant nutrients) and antioxidants.

But, if you do drink tea, experts suggest avoiding additives such as milk, lemon, or sugar because they combine with tea's natural flavonoids and decrease the benefits. In addition, stay away from prepackaged iced teas because they contain citric acid and high amounts of sugars. It does not matter whether the tea is warm or cold—as long as it is home brewed without additives.

Kenton Ross, DMD, FAGD, AGD spokesperson, sees patients' erosion problems on a daily basis in his practice. "Severe cases of erosion occur monthly and are frequently associated with high rates of soft drink consumption," he says. "This study clearly shows that brewed teas resulted in dramatically less enamel loss than soft drinks and acidic juices," says Dr. Ross. "I would highly recommend patients choose tea as an alternative to more erosive drinks like soda and fruit juice."

Tips to decrease erosion:

- Reduce or eliminate carbonated beverages. Instead, drink water, milk, or tea
- Skip the additives such as sugar, lemon, and milk
- Drink acidic drinks quickly and through a straw
- Chew sugar-free gum to increase saliva flow in your mouth
- Rinse with water to neutralize the acids, and wait an hour before brushing

Source: Academy of General Dentistry

Citation: Drink brewed tea to avoid tooth erosion (2008, November 25) retrieved 19 November

2023 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2008-11-brewed-tea-tooth-erosion.html>

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