

Dieters: You Could Be Damaging Your Dental Health

There are so many popular diet plans in use today, and some may indeed help you lose weight. But you may be jeopardizing the health of your mouth in the process.

Many of the diets that are designed for weight loss are deficient in nutrients that people need to maintain healthy bones and a strong immune system. Being slim does not by default equate to being healthy.

Fruits are often a central ingredient in many diets. While fruits are beneficial as part of a basic nutrition regimen, excessive fruits that are high in acids can cause root hypersensitivity or even erode enamel.

Many dieters use medications to assist in weight loss. Whether they are over-the-counter or prescription, a common side effect is dry mouth. Diminished salivary flow is harmful to the gums. Saliva washes away or dilutes sugars. But equally important, saliva is rich in minerals that are reabsorbed into the enamel to strengthen it.

Diet soft drinks are a hidden source of danger to teeth. “The common belief is that without sugar there is no danger,” says Dr. Jesús Galván, Dental Director for Delta Dental of New Mexico. Read the label of the ingredients. Near the top of the label is phosphoric acid, which will etch and roughen the tooth surface just as acid from sugar. “In moderation, the potential for decay may be minimal, but then that’s true of regular soft drinks,” adds Dr. Galván.

When simple dieting crosses over to become an eating disorder, dental health is especially at risk. Dieters who become bulimic, inducing vomiting to lose weight, subject their teeth to strong stomach acids. Because there is a telltale pattern to enamel erosion in bulimia, dentists are in a unique position to identify and help people with this disorder.