



7 things that can ruin your smile

By

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Your smile is one of your best assets, so, of course, you want to keep it sparkling.

But even if you brush, use white strips, and visit your dentist twice a year, it may not be enough.

Here are some factors that can wreak havoc on your teeth and gums, and put a serious damper on your smile.

1. Sports drinks

In the last decade, sports beverages have become increasingly popular, but they aren't great for your teeth.

"Scientific research has found that the pH levels in many sports drinks could lead to tooth erosion due to their high concentration of acidic components, which could wear away at the tooth's enamel," says David F. Halpern, DMD, FAGD, president of the Academy of General Dentistry.

Additionally, these drinks are often high in sugars that act as "food" for acid-producing bacteria, which then sneak into the cracks and crevices in your teeth, causing cavities and tooth decay.

2. Bottled water

Tap water often contains fluoride—about 60% of people in the U.S. have fluoride in their water supply.

However, most bottled waters contain less fluoride than recommended for good oral health (it will be listed as an ingredient on the label if it is an additive).

"Fluoride makes the entire tooth structure more resistant to decay and promotes remineralization, which aids in repairing early decay before damage is even visible," explains Academy of General Dentistry spokesperson, Charles H. Perle, DMD, FAGD.

"Studies have confirmed [that] the most effective source of fluoride is water fluoridation."

3. Diabetes

Diabetes reduces the body's resistance to infection, so you're at a risk for gum disease. Brushing, flossing, and monitoring [your blood sugar](#) can help.

"Diabetes is directly related to periodontal disease, so seeing the dentist and having your triglycerides and cholesterol levels checked on a regular basis is also crucial," stresses Perle.

Perle also points out that research has shown that diabetics can reduce the amount of insulin they need to take by maintaining good gum health.

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4. Tobacco

Smoking turns your teeth yellow, but it can be much more damaging than that.

"Using any form of tobacco can harm your teeth and gums in a number of ways," says Halpern.

"It can cause throat, lung, and mouth cancer, and even death. Additionally, the tar from tobacco forms a sticky film on teeth, which harbors bacteria that promote acid production and create irritating toxins, both of which cause gum inflammation, tooth decay, and loss."

5. Wine

Wine drinkers beware: Regular wine consumption can harm tooth enamel.

According to Halpern, wine's acidity can dissolve the tooth structure, and both red and white wine can increase dental staining. Still, you don't have to give up your regular glass of vino to save your smile.

"Enamel erosion develops when wine drinkers swish the wine, keeping it in constant contact with the enamel, so instead, take small sips and rinse with water when you're done drinking," advises Perle.

6. Pregnancy

It's especially important to take care of your teeth and gums when you're expecting, since studies show a link between untreated gum disease and pre-term and low-birth-weight babies.

"Changes in hormone levels during pregnancy, particularly surges in estrogen and progesterone, can [cause inflammation](#) of the gums, which can lead to gingivitis (red, swollen, tender gums that are more likely to bleed) and put you at risk for infection," says Academy of General Dentistry spokesperson, Gigi Meinecke, DDS, FAGD.

If you have morning sickness, rinse your mouth with water or rub your teeth with a paste of baking soda and water to neutralize the acid caused by vomiting, since it can lead to tooth decay.



7. Diet pills

Even though they may seem like a quick way to trim your waist, diet pills can also be a fast track to gum disease and tooth decay.

"Like many over-the-counter and prescription medications, diet pills decrease salivary flow, which causes dry mouth and puts you at risk for gum disease, tooth decay, cavities, and discomfort," says Halpern.

Bottom line: A balanced diet and exercise are the safest way to lose weight and protect your smile.

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