

The Effects of Tooth Erosion

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In the past, dental erosion was considered a problem for older adults who complained of hypersensitivity after a lifetime of dietary and environmental insults to their teeth. Today, erosion is becoming a topic of discussion among all age groups. No one wants to believe that a 5-year-old can suffer from erosion, but dentists are seeing eroded enamel in a wide range of patients, including children.

The concept of erosion is not new. In his 1803 book *The Natural History of the Human Teeth*, John Hunter referred to “decay of the teeth by denudation” (what we currently call erosion) and was careful to differentiate it from what we now know as bacterial-induced caries. If the concept hasn’t changed, however, the factors that cause it have. A number of research papers have credited an increase in erosion to aspects of modern living that didn’t exist in 1803.

A 2007 survey of Academy of General Dentistry (AGD) members found that most dentists believe that tooth erosion is more common today than it was even five years ago; many also believe that the consumption of soft drinks (as well as other beverages, foods, and sour candies with a low pH value) contributes to the growing problem.

It is essential that dentists understand the importance of early diagnosis, routine management, and carefully considered restorative treatment of dental erosion. In turn, it’s essential that dentists pass this awareness to their patient base, who may not fully understand the concept of erosion as it applies to dentistry.

Common sense approaches to erosion management include consuming fewer acidic beverages (and consuming them less frequently); altering the way in which acidic beverages are consumed (e.g., using a straw); drinking more water; and finishing meals with an alkaline food, such as a piece of cheese or glass of milk, to help neutralize acid.

The mechanically induced tooth wear influenced by erosion can be counteracted by providing chemical protection, such as fluoride and remineralizing agents; reducing abrasive influences, such as aggressive tooth brushing; prescribing mechanical protection, such as oral appliances for use during sleep; and identifying intrinsic acid sources, such as bulimia-related bingeing and purging and gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD).

If you have a dental question or a concern about erosion, please call A Unique Dental Experience® 254-4000, or visit us on the web at www.drdell.com.