Dear Alice,

I was told by my dentist that my teeth eroded, due to consumption of too much acidic food. I would like to know what kind of food causes tooth erosion. Do you have a list of these foods?

Thanks,
Shirley

Answer

Dear Shirley,

That sounds like a sour situation! Over time, acidic foods and beverages can weaken and lead to the deterioration of dental enamel — the hard outer layer of tissue that supports and defends tooth structure. If the enamel thins and breaks down, it may start to reveal the inner yellow tinted dental tissue called dentin. This may result in symptoms such as sensitivity to hot and cold foods. While it’s not possible to reverse this damage, eating acidic foods in moderation and practicing more preventive strategies can help you avoid further damage to your teeth.

Some of the acidic foods that your dentist may have been referring to include:

- Citrus or citrus-flavored foods
- Tomatoes
- Sticky candies, honey, and dried fruits
- Carbonated drinks
- Sour candies
- Yogurt

To prevent further breakdown of enamel and damage to your teeth, there are some steps you can take. If you’ve eaten something acidic, it’s a good idea to wait 20 to 30 minutes before brushing your teeth. This gives your mouth some time to produce enough saliva to neutralize the acidity as well as allows the enamel to harden again. If you’re looking to speed up the process, you can chew sugar-free gum or finish a meal with dairy or another calcium-rich treat to increase the amount of saliva produced. If you choose to enjoy an occasional soda, using a straw and
avoiding any swishing or holding of it in your mouth can reduce your teeth’s exposure to these products. It’s also a good idea to talk with your dentist about investing in a toothpaste specially designed to prevent enamel breakdown. Ultimately, research suggests that the best strategy is to avoid consuming acidic foods and beverages, when possible.

If these strategies don’t help, it’s best to keep working and consulting with your dentist. They may also be able to determine whether you’re a good candidate for dentin bonding, a procedure in which professionals paint dentin onto the surface of damaged teeth. This open dialogue and teamwork is imperative to not only prevent further damage but to hopefully protect your teeth for years to come. For more info on taking care of those pearly whites, check out the Oral Health section of the Go Ask Alice! archives.

Here’s to some abso-tooth-ly healthy teeth!

Alice!
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