

## HEALTH TEETH

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# Bright future for your teeth



Old age need not steal our smile, if we remember to protect against tooth wear

BY PROFESSOR ANDREW EDER

**A**GEING IS inevitable. What isn't inevitable, — thank goodness — although it was once thought to be, is losing our teeth along the way.

After all, what's the point of buying lotions and potions and lovely clothes, and having our hair done, if there's a big gap when we smile? Talk about a self-esteem-stealer.

It is true that at different ages we need slightly different levels of oral health care, for example children need toothpaste at a particular fluoride level and smaller toothbrushes than those used by adults.

They also tend to be very susceptible to acids from the likes of fruit and fruit juices. The thing is, the acid from the "healthy" options, which parents try so hard to choose over sweets, attacks the outer surface of the teeth. Over time, this acid attack causes the outer enamel to wear away, resulting in short and unattractive teeth, which may also feel rough or sensitive.

Then, as we grow older, there is a gravitation to sparkling and alcoholic drinks, which can also have the same effect. Plus, there is the increasing risk of eating disorders — and the acid in the mouth caused by self-induced vomiting can have the same result, long term.

To prevent this happening, there are some simple steps you and your children can take, including:

- Drink still water or low-fat milk between meals.
- Limit fruit juice to once per day and avoid fizzy drinks.
- Rinse the mouth with water for 15 to 30 seconds after consuming acidic foods or drinks, or vomiting.
- Chew sugar-free gum or eat a piece

of cheese after consuming acidic food or drink.

- Wait at least an hour to brush teeth after you have consumed any acidic foods or drinks, or after vomiting.

Stress is another growing problem today and it is common for both children and adults who are stressed to grind and clench their teeth, especially at night. Over the years, this leads to another type of tooth wear, whereby sufferers may experience tooth sensitivity, problems chewing, headaches and neck ache.

The good news is that making a few simple lifestyle changes can be a big help, such as:

- Doing something relaxing before bed, such as yoga, reading or having a bath.
- Learning to brush effectively yet gently with a relatively soft toothbrush and a toothpaste that is low in abrasivity (ask your dentist for advice on this if you're not sure). In addition, your dentist might recommend the use of a mouthguard overnight.

While it is true that some tooth surface loss is to be expected as we age, we can ensure unacceptable levels of progressive wear do not occur by adding simple preventive solutions to our everyday routines, maintaining a nice smile and that all-important self-esteem.

If the opportunity is missed, further down the line you or your children might need extensive and expensive restorative treatment. Some teeth might even be lost, which is when dental implants and all they entail might come into play, to replace missing teeth and protect those that remain.

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