

PROTECTING YOUR TEETH

Light-colored drinks rate worst in tooth study

By Julie Sevens Lyons

Mercury News

It's better to Be a Pepper than to Do the Dew — at least as far as your teeth are concerned.

While coffee, tea and red wine catch plenty of flak for staining our chompers, soda pop — even diet soda — has now been implicated in *damaging* tooth enamel.

Light-colored beverages such as Diet Mountain Dew can erode as much as 8 percent of the tooth's enamel if consumed twice a day for about 13 years, found Dr. Anthony von Fraunhofer, a professor of biomaterials science at the University of Maryland Dental School in Baltimore. The culprit is probably citric acid, not sugar.

But even dark drinks like Pepsi or Dr Pepper can do away with about 2 percent of enamel during the same amount of time, he found. Enamel is the smooth top layer of a tooth that protects the underlying dentin from injury and decay.

Translation? Soda "will rot your teeth," said von Fraunhofer.

Von Fraunhofer said he was startled by the fact that regular sodas and diet drinks did equal damage, and that colas were better for our smiles than lemon-lime sodas.

"The light drinks, the uncolored, really did a number," he said. "Those were the drinks I drink — or used to."

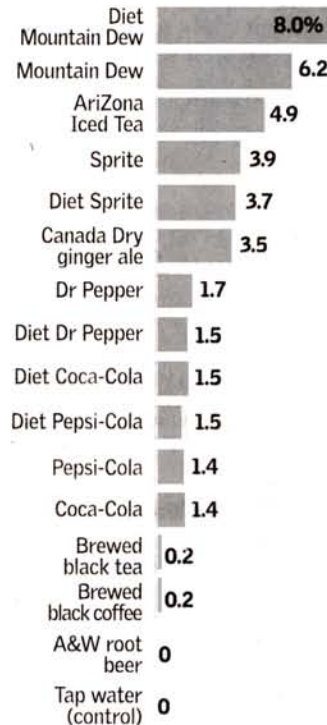
Don't think you're safe if your libation of choice lacks carbonation. The trendy Arizona Iced Tea beverage did more harm than the colas in von Fraunhofer's study of 20 extracted teeth immersed in the drinks. It eroded nearly 5 percent of the tooth's surface.

The American Beverage Association disagrees with the findings, saying that soaking teeth in drinks for two weeks straight, as the researchers did, is much worse than drinking two sodas a day for years.

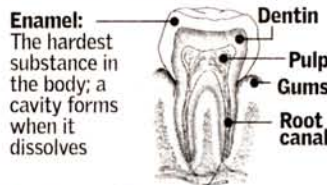
"Beverages only stay in the mouth for a short period of

The soda that ate my teeth

Here is the amount of enamel dissolved when human teeth were placed in containers with different beverages for 14 days, measured in percent of enamel lost by weight:



Parts of the tooth



Source: General Dentistry
ANDREA MASCHIETTO — MERCURY NEWS

time," said Richard Adamson, the association's vice president of scientific and technical affairs. Adamson said consumers should worry more about raisins and other sweet treats that stick to the teeth.

But some dentists say they have long been aware that pop can make your teeth snap and crackle.

"If I see a patient whose enamel has eroded on the front

of their teeth, my first question is 'Do you sip sodas all day?'" said Dr. Bruce Hartley, a cosmetic dentist in Los Altos.

Enamel erosion can leave people at greater risk for cavities and decay.

Yet not all sodas will send you to your dentist's chair. A&W Root Beer, like tap water, caused no enamel erosion in the study, published in the July/August issue of General Dentistry.

And von Fraunhofer said having an occasional soda won't leave you down in the mouth, either.

"The thing is," he said, "don't sip on them hour after hour."

Some soda aficionados are undaunted.

Jim Lalley, a San Jose facilities manager, drinks six Pepsis a day, starting at breakfast. He said he is nonplussed by the notion that he should give up his favorite drink.

"You could tell me they would erode 50 percent and I still wouldn't cut back. I'd probably just brush more," said Lalley. "When I die, I want a six-pack of Pepsi in my coffin with me."

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