

DENTAL HEALTH

Soft Drinks And Orthodontics: A Recipe For Disaster

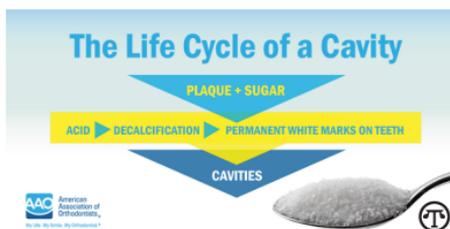
(NAPSA)—Many people don't know that soft drinks—even diet soft drinks, sports and energy drinks, and fruit drinks—contain acids, which can be especially troublesome for people in orthodontic treatment. The American Association of Orthodontists (AAO) strongly advises patients to avoid drinks with low pH levels because the lower the pH level, the more acidic the beverage.

"It's tempting to reach for soft drinks. People around us drink them regularly, they are easily purchased in vending machines and at convenience stores, and many are heavily advertised," says Morris N. Poole, DDS, president of the AAO. "Sugar is known to be bad for the teeth but sugar-free soft drinks present dangers, as well.

"Consumption of soft drinks during orthodontic treatment puts teeth at risk of decay due to the acid attack on enamel," says Dr. Poole. "The acid in soft drinks pulls calcium out of tooth enamel. Repeatedly bathing teeth with acidic soft drinks dissolves enamel and is a sure path to a cavity. If soft drinks contain sugar, the risk increases. Sugar interacts with plaque and forms another acid to further dissolve enamel. When enamel is gone, the loss is permanent."

To help, there's a new AAO educational flier, "Soft Drinks + Orthodontic Treatment = A Recipe for Disaster" (www.mylifemysmile.org/why-you-should-get-orthodontic-treatment), that lists pH levels of more than 30 soft drinks and explains problems and solutions, including:

• **Plaque**—a sticky, colorless film made up of bacteria, food debris and



The acid in regular and diet soft drinks can attack and weaken tooth enamel.

saliva that feeds on sugar and starches. Frequent brushing and daily flossing remove most plaque. Hard-to-reach plaque requires professional attention, however.

• **Damage You Can See**—"I tell patients that a single sip of a soft drink is the catalyst for an attack on tooth enamel, and the attack is renewed with each new sip," says Dr. Poole. These "attacks" can leave white spots or lines on teeth. The portion of a tooth covered by a bracket is protected, but damage around the perimeter can leave a permanent outline of the bracket.

• **Recommendations**—Overall, orthodontic patients should:

1. Never consume soft drinks while wearing clear aligners or clear retainers.

2. Drink fluoridated water and use a fluoride toothpaste.

3. Always follow their orthodontist's instructions on oral hygiene.

If you do have a soft drink:

1. Use a straw.

2. Drink it with a meal.

3. Drink it quickly.

4. Brush right away.

Learn More

For facts on orthodontists and to find one nearby, visit mylifemysmile.org.