

### What is dental erosion?

Erosion is the loss of tooth enamel caused by acid attack. Enamel is the hard, protective coating of the tooth, which protects the sensitive dentine underneath. When the enamel is worn away, the dentine underneath is exposed, which may lead to pain and sensitivity.

### How would I know I have dental erosion?

Erosion usually shows up as hollows in the teeth and a general wearing away of the tooth surface and biting edges. This can expose the dentine underneath, which is a darker, yellower colour than the enamel. Because the dentine is sensitive, your teeth can also be more sensitive to hot, cold or acidic foods and drinks.

### What causes dental erosion?

Every time you eat or drink anything acidic, the enamel on your teeth becomes softer for a short while, and loses some of its mineral content. Your saliva will slowly neutralise this acidity in your mouth and restore it to its natural balance. However, if this acid attack happens too often, your mouth does not have a chance to repair itself and tiny particles of enamel can be brushed away. Over time, you start to lose the surface of your teeth.

### Are there any medical problems which can cause dental erosion?

Food and drink that has a pH value lower than 5.5 is more acidic and can cause tooth erosion. Fizzy drinks in particular can cause enamel erosion. It is important to remember that even the diet brands are harmful. Flavoured fizzy waters can have an effect if taken in large amounts, as they contain weak acids which can harm your teeth.

Acidic foods such as fruit and fruit juices, particularly citrus ones including lemon and orange, contain natural acids which can be harmful to your teeth especially if you have a lot of them often. 'Alcopop' drinks that contain acidic fruits and are fizzy can cause erosion too. Still water is the best drink for teeth, and milk is also good because it helps to neutralise the acids in your mouth.

### Are sports drinks safe?

Many sports drinks contain ingredients that can cause dental erosion. However, it is important for athletes to avoid dehydration because this can lead to a dry mouth and bad breath. Try drinking plain water instead.

### What can I do to prevent dental erosion?

- Limit acidic products and fizzy drinks to mealtimes to reduce the number of acid attacks on your teeth
- Drinks should be drunk quickly without holding in or 'swishing' around your mouth, or use a straw to help drinks go to the back of your mouth and avoid prolonged contact with your teeth.
- Finish a meal with cheese or milk as this will help neutralise the acid.
- Chew sugar-free gum after eating to help produce more saliva to help cancel out the acids which form in your mouth after eating.
- Wait for at least one hour after eating or drinking anything acidic before brushing your teeth. This gives your teeth time to build up their mineral content again.
- Brush your teeth twice a day with a small headed brush with medium to soft bristles and fluoride toothpaste.
- Try brushing before breakfast

#### Should I use any other special products?

We recommend you use fluoride toothpaste twice a day. In severe cases fluoride supplements such as rinses and gels may be used once a day. Your dentist or hygienist will tell you the best supplements to use.

#### How can it be treated?

Dental erosion does not always need to be treated. With regular check ups your dentist can prevent the problem getting any worse and erosion going any further. In some cases however it is important to protect the tooth and the dentine underneath to prevent sensitivity. In these cases, simply bonding a filling onto the tooth will be enough to repair it. In more severe cases the dentist may need to fit a veneer. (See our leaflet *'Tell Me About Veneers'*.)

#### How much will treatment cost?

Costs will vary, depending on the type of treatment necessary and on your method of payment. It is important to discuss all the treatment options with your dentist and get a written estimate of the costs before starting treatment.