



WELLBEING

Long in the Tooth

Look after your gnashers properly and they should last you a lifetime. With the help of a top dentist, we brush up on the latest ways to keep your teeth tip-top

Dentures or false teeth, whatever you call them, they are no substitute for the real thing – yet we all know someone in an older generation who has them. But is losing your teeth simply an inevitable consequence of the ageing process? Or is it something you can avoid? James Goolnik of London's Bow Lane Dental Group believes that by being aware of the main dangers to our teeth, and following some simple rules to protect them, we can grow old with our teeth healthy and intact. Here is his advice...

BE DRINK AWARE

James believes that the main threats to your mouth are sugar and acids – which is why drinking alcohol poses a problem for your teeth. Most alcoholic drinks contain sugar, which along with your mouth bacteria can cause tooth decay. Worse still, arriving home drunk can mean forgetting to brush your teeth and therefore allowing the bacteria to have a party in your mouth, leading to cavities.

A lot of alcoholic drinks, especially ones with

carbonated mixers, are very acidic and can dissolve your tooth enamel, leading to sensitive teeth and making them more vulnerable to decay. Meanwhile, if you really have drunk too much, vomiting poses more problems, as it brings stomach acid into your mouth, which contributes towards the enamel dissolving.

Fizzy and sports drink are just as bad as they contain a large amount of sugar and acids that can dissolve your teeth, and even the sugar-free ones contain loads of acid. After a single sip it takes your mouth 20 minutes to neutralise this acid.

James suggests

- In between alcoholic drinks, swish your mouth with water.
- Chew sugar-free gum on your way home from a night out to increase saliva flow as this will help neutralise the acid and wash away the sugars.
- Leave your toothbrush on your pillow before you leave the house so you do not forget to brush when you get back.
- Reduce the number of drinks you have and, if you can, drink through a straw to avoid the liquid touching your teeth.
- Do not brush straight after a having a drink, but if you must then swill with water for 20 seconds first or use sugar-free gum afterwards.
- Try and limit drinks to mealtimes; that way, the food will help neutralise the acid.

NOT ALL WHITE

Beware of some home whitening kits as not all are CE approved and they may contain acidic or high concentrations of peroxide, James warns. In the EU you can only buy up to 0.1 per cent peroxide over the counter and up to 6 per cent peroxide from your dentist. Concentrations above this can cause permanent damage to your teeth and lead to chronic sensitivity.

James suggests

- Only buy CE-approved kits.

- Speak to your dentist about whitening as they will offer the fastest and safest options.

ON GUARD!

If you play a sport that involves physical contact or moving objects and have ever been knocked in the face with enough force to cause pain, you are lucky you did not get a tooth knocked out. Research by the American Dental Association found that mouth guards prevented approximately 200,000 injuries a year in school football alone.

James suggests

- Generic mouth guards are available from shops or on the internet, but while they provide some protection, they tend to be bulky and often interfere with talking and breathing. Instead, use a custom-made mouth guard from your dentist, which will offer maximum protection and comfort so you can concentrate fully on the game.

HARD KNOCK LIFE

"Enamel is the hardest substance in your body, but it's no match for a beer bottle," says James. Teeth are incredibly brittle from certain angles, which is why opening packets, chewing your nails and tearing sticky tape are classic causes of chipped teeth. Ice cubes and hard sweets can also crack your teeth. You usually hear a cracking sound and then experience sharp pain.

James suggests

- Always use a bottle opener or scissors.
- Suck rather than crunch sweets, and if you must chew on ice, use the crushed variety.

PIERCING PROBLEMS

They may be seen as cool, but tongue and lip piercings can cause damage inside your mouth. Because your tongue is constantly moving, the piercing can chip neighbouring teeth and cause gum swelling.

James suggests

- If you have a lip or tongue piercing, get it checked regularly by your dentist. They can monitor for signs of infection and treat it.

SMOKE SIGNALS

Smokers' mouths have a reduced blood supply, which means the warning signals associated with gum disease often go undetected, and the first sign that problems are developing is when the teeth start to become loose. Usually, gums bleed when there is gum disease, but in smokers this is also hidden until it is too late. Smoking can also lead to oral cancer.

James suggests

- See your dentist, who can look for the early warning signs.
- Brush twice a day as this can help reduce the progression of gum disease.
- Quit smoking – call the NHS smoking helpline free on 0800-022 4332.

ON DRUGS

It is not just illegal drugs like cannabis, cocaine, ecstasy and methamphetamine that can damage your mouth; some prescription and over-the-counter medications are acidic and may eat away at your teeth. Chewable vitamin tablets, aspirin, asthma medications and cough syrups are especially bad, leading to possible tooth damage. Certain medications will also dry out your mouth, making it more susceptible to infection and decay.

James suggests

- Use sugar-free gum to increase the flow of your saliva.
- Never rub drugs onto your gums – this causes ulcers and shrinkage of the gums.
- Speak to your GP about the possible side effects of any medication.
- Contact your nearest drug support service for help with substance misuse. [H](#)

MOUTH GUARDIANS

FIGHT BACK AGAINST DECAY AND KEEP YOUR MOUTH CLEAN AND FRESH WITH THE FOLLOWING PHARMACY PRODUCTS

↪ Corsodyl Spray, £7.75, for when you cannot get to a toothbrush.

↪ UltraDex Daily Oral Rinse, £8.15.

↪ Colgate Interdental toothpaste, £3.49.

↪ CB12 mint menthol mouthwash, £14.59.

↪ Sensodyne Pronamel Extra Freshness Fresh Mint toothpaste, £4.07.

↪ Oral-B TriZone 3000 electric toothbrush, £99.99.