

**In this brochure:**

- What tooth erosion is and what causes it
- How it affects your oral and overall health
- Ways you can manage erosion and prevent future erosion

**ADA Healthy Smile Tips**

- Brush your teeth twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste.
- Clean between your teeth daily.
- Eat a healthy diet that limits sugary beverages and snacks.
- See your dentist regularly for prevention and treatment of oral disease.

For more information about taking care of your mouth and teeth, visit [MouthHealthy.org](http://MouthHealthy.org), the ADA's website just for patients.



Acid erosion images shown in this brochure are courtesy of:  
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# Tooth Erosion

## The harmful effects of acid

**What is Tooth Erosion?**

**Tooth erosion (ee-ROW-shun)** happens when the protective, outer layer of your tooth (**enamel**) begins to wear away, exposing the layer beneath it (**dentin**).

When the enamel thins out, your tooth protection is weakened and the inside layers can be exposed to more acid and bacteria. This puts you at a greater risk of having problems like decay, cavities and infection.

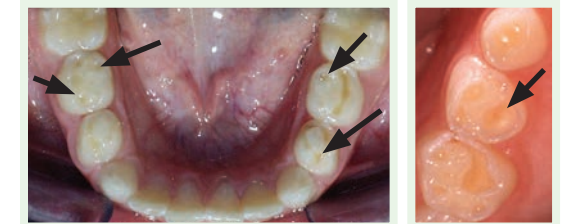
**Acid is a main cause of tooth erosion**

Tooth erosion happens from several causes that have one thing in common — acid exposure. The amount of acid that your tooth is exposed to can be a major reason why you could have tooth erosion. These are some main ways that acid can erode your teeth.

- **Drinking beverages that have high levels of acid.** This includes sodas, fruit juices, sports drinks and energy drinks.
- **Acid Reflux/GERD.** Acid reflux happens when acids from your stomach travel up your throat and into your mouth. Heartburn is how people sometimes describe acid reflux. If you have heartburn most days or nights, then you may have acid reflux disorder — which is also called GERD. This acid from your stomach can cause erosion on the inside surfaces of your teeth.



Drinking too many sodas can cause the enamel on your teeth to wear away. Staining is also likely.



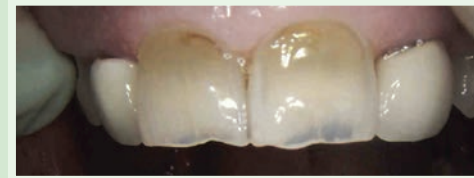
Acid reflux can wear your enamel away and create pits that look like "moon craters" on the chewing surfaces of your teeth. This is also called "cupping".

## Acidic drinks can erode your teeth

When you sip on acidic drinks, the acid washes over your teeth and weakens your enamel. If you sip these drinks several times a day, your teeth are under constant threat from the acid and don't have a chance to stay strong and protect against decay-causing bacteria.



## You may also be able to see signs of tooth erosion:



Your teeth may look shiny, transparent or yellow/stained.



There may be dimples or "pits" on the chewing surfaces of your teeth.



Your teeth may change in size and shape as the enamel erodes.

## Tooth erosion harms your teeth and overall health

These are some of the common problems that are linked with tooth erosion:

- **Sensitive teeth**
- **Decay and cavities**
- **Infection**
- **Abscess** (puss-filled sac) can form.
- **Tooth loss**
- **Loss of confidence** in the look of your smile.



Tooth erosion can cause many problems and may even affect how you feel about your smile. Eroded teeth can become yellow or discolored and they are more at risk to decay and sensitivity.

## Managing tooth erosion

Once your teeth are eroded, there is no way to treat it. But, there are ways to manage it that can also help to prevent future erosion. What to do about your tooth erosion will depend on what is causing it to happen as well as your own personal health history.

Some of the most common ways to manage tooth erosion are:

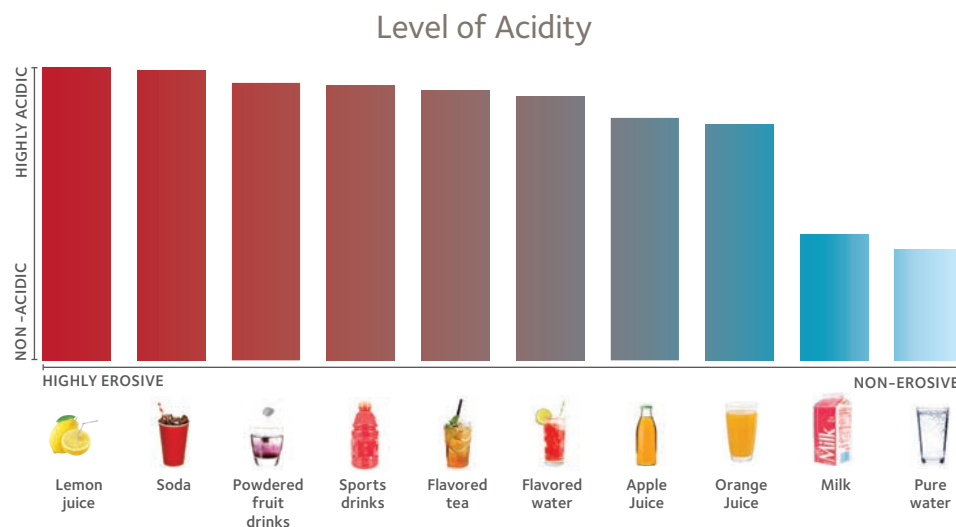
- **Veneers** — a thin but strong covering that's placed over the front part of your tooth. It's made to look like your natural tooth and can restore the look of your smile.
- **Tooth Restoration** — If you have a cavity then you may need a filling. You may also need a crown if the cavity is larger than what a filling can restore.
- **Root Canal** — If the nerves of your tooth are infected then you may need root canal therapy.
- **Tooth Removal** — If the erosion is severe and your tooth can't be restored, then it may need to be removed.

## Ways to tell if you have tooth erosion

The chewing surfaces of your teeth may become sensitive to hot and cold and even touch. This is because the enamel is no longer providing complete protection of the dentin. This can mean that you will be more sensitive to hot or cold and even to outside air.

## Is your favorite drink harmful to your teeth?

A wide variety of popular beverages are highly acidic. Beverage types that are highly erosive start on the left on this graph. These are just a few of the types of drinks you may be enjoying every once in a while:



**Wait at least 1 hour before you brush!**

You may think you are doing the responsible thing by brushing your teeth right away after drinking your favorite beverage, but you actually may be doing more harm than good.

Acids can attack your enamel and soften it. Your saliva rinses acids away and helps your enamel to re-harden. If you brush before the enamel has time to re-harden then it can damage the enamel. Waiting an hour before brushing lowers the risk of harming your enamel.

## Tips to prevent tooth erosion

- **Change your habits** — sometimes, the only action that is recommended is to change your daily habits to help prevent your erosion from getting worse. Your dentist or hygienist can recommend what changes you should make.
- **Eat a healthy diet**
  - **Drink plain water** or milk when you can.
  - **Drink acid-containing beverages only once in a while.**
    - Drink through a straw to lower your teeth's exposure to the acids in your drink.
    - Rinse your mouth with plain water after you are finished with your drink.
  - **Eat or drink sugary items with meals instead of on their own.**
  - **Chew sugarless gum or suck on sugarless mints/hard candies** (that are not sour-flavored) after meals.
- Look for oral health care products with the **American Dental Association Seal of Acceptance**. The ADA Seal in this category means that a product is both safe and effective in helping to prevent and reduce enamel erosion from dietary acids.
- **If you suffer from frequent heartburn or acid reflux**, talk to your physician about ways you can get it under control.
- **If you suffer from dry mouth**, talk to your dentist about options that can help bring you relief.



**Get help for your eating disorder**

You aren't alone. Talk to your dentist or physician about how you can get healthy again. Or, call the National Eating Disorders Association Helpline and talk to someone confidentially. **1.800.931-2237.**