

Common habits that harm your teeth

May 3 2013, by Carolyn Pennington

Are you wrecking your teeth without even knowing it? For instance, chewing on ice or opening stuff with your teeth may be convenient but using your teeth as tools can cause them to crack or chip.

Dr. Sarita Arteaga, associate professor in the Department of Reconstructive Sciences with the UConn School of [Dental Medicine](#), says while some of these [dental health](#) "don'ts" can do immediate damage to your [teeth](#) (by cracking or breaking them), the effects of others may add up over time, harming your dental health in the long run.

Don't brush too hard

Brushing your teeth regularly is part of good [oral hygiene](#), but if you brush too vigorously, you can cause more harm than good. Brushing your teeth too hard can wear down enamel, irritate your gums, make your teeth sensitive to cold, and even cause cavities.

Do you crunch on ice? Cool it

Ice cubes may seem harmless, but the [cold temperature](#) and the hardness of ice cubes can cause serious damage to your teeth. Our teeth are designed to crush through things, not against something.

Refrain from jaw clenching and tooth grinding

For some people, stress can trigger frequent clenching of the jaw or

grinding of the teeth. There is a severe amount of pressure on your teeth when you do that, and you can get microfractures or actual [fractures](#) in your teeth. Microfractures are weakened areas in your teeth that put them at risk for further damage. Jaw clenching or tooth grinding can also damage dental work.

Your teeth are not a tool

Many people use their teeth to break off a tag on clothing, rip open a package of [potato chips](#), or even unscrew bottle tops. But teeth are not pliers, teeth are not hooks. Using your teeth as a tool is a threat to dental health and can damage dental work or cause your teeth to crack.

Boycott nail biting

Biting your nails doesn't just harm the appearance of your hands—it can also damage your teeth and become an oral hygiene issue. Regularly biting your nails can cause your teeth to move out of place. In addition, nail biting could potentially cause teeth to break or tooth enamel to splinter.

Say no to soda and sugar

Carbonated drinks can be bad for your teeth, because they tend to be very acidic. The effects of soda on teeth are even worse if you slowly sip it over a long period of time. The acidity in soda can lead to dental health problems such as decay around your [gum](#) line and loss of enamel.

The longer sugar stays in your mouth, the worse it is. Sugar is consumed by acid-producing bacteria in your mouth. The acids eat away at tooth enamel. Avoid foods like jelly candies, which stick in your teeth longer than other foods and bathe them in sugar. Dried fruit such as raisins are

no better. Reach for fresh fruit instead.

Use toothpicks carefully

When used properly, toothpicks can help keep the areas between your teeth clean. If you do it carefully, using toothpicks is helpful. If you don't, you are going to hurt your gum tissue. So be careful not to get too aggressive with that toothpick in your quest for oral hygiene. Nothing you do to your teeth or gums should ever hurt—if it does, it may be damaging your teeth.

Oral piercings

If you pierce your tongue, lips, cheeks or uvula (the tiny tissue that hangs at the back of the throat,) it can interfere with speech, chewing or swallowing. It may also cause damage to gums, teeth and fillings. A common habit of biting or playing with the piercing can injure your gums and lead to cracked, scratched or sensitive teeth. Piercings can also damage fillings.

Provided by University of Connecticut

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