

# Sipping is terrible for your teeth

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If you think sugar, soda, and sticky sweets are bad for your teeth, you're right. But there's something even worse: sipping.

Think about that coffee sitting on your desk, the tea you sip throughout the day, and every cup you do not finish in one swift go. Research shows

that [acid](#) is the primary determinant of a beverage's potential to damage your [teeth](#). And almost every beverage available, including sparkling water, is acidic to some degree.

Unless your drink is flat water, nursing a beverage for hours is detrimental to your [oral health](#).

"Tooth enamel is the hardest mineralized substance in your body, but prolonged exposure to acid, especially acidic liquids, can cause teeth to demineralize, erode, and become more susceptible to cavities," says Dante Devoti, DMD, assistant professor of dental medicine at Columbia University's College of Dental Medicine. "Drinking one cup of coffee, tea, juice, or other drink in a single sitting is better for your teeth than sipping one cup throughout the entire day."

We asked Devoti to explain the damage sipping drinks does to teeth.

## **Th role of oral pH**

To have a healthy mouth, the balance of acid and base inside should be as neutral as possible.

Science class reminder: pH measures how acidic or basic (alkaline) something is, on a scale from 1 to 14. A pH of 7 is neutral. The lower the pH (less than 7), the more acidic. The higher the pH (more than 7), the more alkaline.

The longer acid lingers in your mouth, the faster damage will occur. Saliva washes away [food particles](#) and neutralizes oral pH. But it's not instantaneous.

"Whenever you eat or drink something other than still water, it takes about 60 minutes for your saliva to elevate the pH out of the more

harmful acidic range back towards the more protective neutral range," says Devoti.

## **Sipping increases tooth erosion**

When you regularly sip the same cup throughout the day, saliva does not have time to raise your oral pH, so teeth are not remineralized and strengthened. Persistently low pH creates an environment where teeth are at increased risk of erosion, when tooth structure dissolves.

Further, says Devoti, "adding sugars, cream, or flavoring agents to coffee, tea, and other beverages makes them even greater offenders to your teeth, especially if sipping."

## **Soda and your teeth**

Acid plus [sugar](#) is the worst combination for oral health. "Drinking [soda](#) is essentially a sugary acid bath for the teeth," says Devoti. Sodas have a pH between 3 and 4. Teeth begin to break down when oral pH is lower than 5.5.

In addition, sugars in soda are a [food source](#) for [harmful bacteria](#) present in the mouth. Bacteria consume sugars and convert them into acid, reducing oral pH even more. "Sugary drinks create a cycle of destruction to your teeth," says Devoti.

This does not mean sugar-free and diet sodas are safe for teeth: They are acidic and the substitute chemicals offer other negatives.

## **The bottom line**

"When there's repeated, long exposures, almost all food and drink can be

considered harmful to teeth," says Devoti. "Good oral habits go beyond brushing and flossing to recognizing how eating and drinking habits, such as frequently snacking or sipping on beverages throughout the day, can be equally impactful on the health of our teeth."

Provided by Columbia University Irving Medical Center

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