

# Junk food and poor oral health increase risk of premature heart disease

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The association between poor oral health and increased risk of cardiovascular disease should make the reduction of sugars such as those contained in junk food, particularly fizzy drinks, an important health policy target, say experts writing in the *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*.

Poor oral hygiene and excess sugar consumption can lead to [periodontal disease](#) where the supporting bone around the teeth is destroyed. It is thought that chronic infection from gum disease can trigger an inflammatory response that leads to heart disease through a process called atherosclerosis, or hardening of the arteries. Despite convincing evidence linking poor [oral health](#) to premature [heart disease](#), the most recent UK national guidance on the prevention of CVD at population level mentions the reduction of sugar only indirectly.

Dr Ahmed Rashid, Department of Public Health and Primary Care, University of Cambridge, who co-wrote the paper, said: "As well as having high levels of fats and salt, junk foods often contain a great deal of sugar and the effect this has on oral health may be an important additional mechanism by which junk food elevates risk of CVD."

He added: "Among different types of [junk food](#), soft drinks have raised particular concerns and are the main source of free sugar for many individuals." The authors refer to the well-publicised New York 'soda ban' controversy which has brought the issue to the attention of many. Yet, they point out, in the UK fizzy drinks remain commonly available

in public areas ranging from hospitals to schools. Dr Rashid said: "The UK population should be encouraged to reduce fizzy drink intake and improve oral hygiene. Reducing sugar consumption and managing dental problems early could help prevent heart problems later in life."

**More information:** Junk food and heart disease: the missing tooth,  
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