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*For the smiles of your life.*

**Now's the Time to Change Those  
Daily Habits That Damage Your Teeth**

A recent article in WebMD Magazine discussed how bad habits can damage teeth. Everything from the obvious of not flossing regularly, to drinking too many sports drinks, to biting your pen can lead to problems with your teeth. A person's teeth are supposed to last a lifetime, so we thought we would share the following list of bad habits you can avoid or change to preserve your wonderful smile. What better way to start the New Year!

**Ingesting too much sugar.** Teeth's number one enemy is sugar - the longer it's in your mouth, the worse it is. Acid-producing bacteria in your mouth consume the sugar, then the acids eat away at tooth enamel.

**Drinking soda and / or sports drinks.** Soda and sports drinks are equally awful for your teeth in that they both contain acid and huge amounts of sugar. Also harmful are club soda (due to its acidity) and juices with added sugar. Sugar and acids can coat the teeth and erode the enamel. If you must drink liquids with sugar, drink them all at one time rather than throughout the day, or at a minimum, rinse with water between drinks to neutralize the acid.

**Drinking too much alcohol.** Alcohol is acidic and can erode the teeth. It can also dry out your mouth, reducing saliva production, which is hazardous in that saliva washes the teeth and helps remove plaque and bacterial accumulations from the teeth's surface. Keeping plaque at bay means there is a lower risk for bacterial acids to cause decay. Be sure to rinse your mouth with water between drinks to avoid the pitfalls of alcohol.

**Smoking or chewing tobacco.** Besides the fact that smoking contributes to periodontal (gum) disease, nicotine yellows teeth and may also cause oral cancer. Chewing tobacco can be a greater health risk as tobacco and its associated carcinogens contact the gums and soft tissues directly, then stay there for a long time.

**Crunching ice.** Solid objects, like ice, should not be crushed with teeth. Teeth aren't intended to chew or bite hard objects like ice, hard candy or hard food as doing so can put you at risk for teeth fractures.

**Using mouthwash, but not flossing.** To remove bacteria between teeth and below the gums, one must floss - not just rinse. Mouthwash provides added protection against gingivitis causing bacteria, but flossing is critical.

**Medications causing dry mouth.** Some 500 plus medicines can cause dry mouth, which inhibit saliva production and increases the risk of cavities. Be sure to check with our office to review a list of the medications that can cause dry mouth.

**Protecting your permanent teeth when engaged in sports.** Many contact sports require a mouth guard. Protecting teeth during recreational activities (such as martial arts or skateboarding) is also essential. Standard mouth guards can be found at most sports stores, but for the best protection and comfort, ask us to make a mouth guard especially for you.

**Teeth are not tools.** Teeth should not be used to replace cutting or opening tools such as scissors, bottle openers, or knives because they are simply not tools. Biting a thread, ripping tape, snapping off bottle caps or removing clothing tags are all no-no's. You can harm your teeth and jaw by using your teeth as a tool.

**Biting your pen or nails.** Our teeth can crack or break if we hold pens, glasses, pencils or other solid and hard objects in our mouth for a sustained period of time. In addition, nail biting may cause cracks in the teeth or splinters, and introduces germs into the mouth that can cause infection.

**Teeth grinding and jaw clenching.** Both of these are very detrimental for teeth. Grinding teeth during sleep can wear them down greatly, and clenching the jaw while sleeping or feeling stressed puts too much pressure on it. Try to relax or use a night guard to protect your teeth if you grind them during slumber. Grinding and clenching often go on during the day, so try to be aware of your behaviors.

**Using the right toothbrush.** Toothbrushes come with soft, medium or hard bristles. Hard bristles can damage tooth enamel, so opt for a soft bristle brush instead. Too much brushing can cause sensitivity, so stick to a routine of brushing two or three times each day and floss daily. In addition, don't use toothpicks or other small items to get something out of your teeth. This can cause tooth and gum damage.

**Ignoring regular dental care.** It's essential to maintain a consistent schedule for oral health check ups. Failure to do so can result in big problems eventually.

Recognizing and admitting you are guilty of some bad oral habits is the first step to making healthy, helpful changes. Practicing a routine of good oral hygiene and proper dental care is key to your ongoing good oral health.