

Hygiene Corner

Are Runners Ruining Their Teeth?

In a study conducted by the School of Dental Medicine at the University Hospital Heidelberg in Germany, researchers analyzing the teeth of 35 triathletes who put in at least 10 hours of training a week determined that the harder the triathletes worked, the more acidic their saliva became and—unsurprisingly—the worse their levels of tooth erosion.

Add to this dilemma the carbs and sugar in sports drinks and protein bars that athletes likely consume before and after working out, and their mouths are now has the perfect environment for cavities, according to Jessica Emery, DMD, a Chicago-based cosmetic dentist. “Sugar feeds the decay-causing bacteria, and our defenses against this bad bacteria live in our saliva,” Dr. Emery said, adding that lower saliva rates makes it harder for your mouth to keep itself clean and create a dry mouth condition also referred to at times as “runner’s mouth.”

A remedy for this condition? Stay hydrated; drink water before, during, and after workouts, and if you are distance runner, consider increasing your salt intake, which allows your body to retain water.

Researchers to WHO: “Even Less Sugar!”

Researchers at University College London (UCL) and the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, in a study reported in the journal *BMC Public Health*, say free sugars should be no more than 3% of total energy intake in a person’s diet in order to avoid tooth decay. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines free sugars as including monosaccharides and disaccharides added to foods and sugars naturally present in honey, syrups, fruit juices, and fruit concentrates.

Analyzing global public records of dental health and diet, the researchers found tooth decay rose dramatically at any sugar intake level of more than zero percent of energy. And while the WHO recommends 10% of free sugar energy intake as a maximum—with 5% preferred—the new study suggests the lower figure should be considered a maximum, with a preferred target of less than 3%.

“Tooth decay is a serious problem worldwide, and reducing sugars intake makes a huge difference,” said UCL dental public health professor Aubrey Sheiham, citing as an example Japan, where the population was without access to any sugar during or immediately after World War II, and data showed a huge reduction in tooth decay during that period. When the country eventually began imports of sugar again, the incidence of tooth decay rose dramatically.