

# “Healthy” Beverage Alternatives?

By Dr. Eric Gustavsen, Published in the Walla Walla Union Bulletin 04/22/11

Move over Coke, you’ve got competition! For years dentists have used Coca-Cola as the standard by which tooth destroying products have been judged. It’s well known that the acid in Coke will remove corrosion from battery terminals, clean rust off your bumper, and remove stain from your porcelain toilet (rumor has it Coca Cola will even dissolve nails, given sufficient immersion time). Also known, but sometimes ignored, is that the acid in Coca Cola and other soft drinks will burn holes in your teeth.

Dentists and hygienists, however, are seeing the effects of a new generation of drinks that are far worse in their ability to destroy enamel. Advertising promotes energy and sports drinks as “healthy” alternatives to soft drinks. These drinks may contain energizing enzymes but along with amino acids you are often getting very high concentrations of citric and phosphoric acid. These drinks frequently contain nearly as much sugar as Coke, and in many cases have a higher concentration of destructive acids. In a publication of the Academy of General Dentistry, Trac research presented a jaw dropping list of today’s most harmful drinks based on how much enamel they can destroy in a two week period.

Those of us in the Dental Profession are particularly concerned about the destructive effects these drinks have on patients with

braces and those who slowly sip these drinks throughout the day. The acid creates very unsightly, difficult to repair white predecay and decayed areas.

Some might be tempted to feel smug because they are drinking Diet Soda, which of course has no sugar so must be safe for the teeth, right? Wrong. The acid in any of these drinks bypasses the usual cavity making step of providing sugar to the plaque on teeth which then produce acid which then makes holes in teeth. The acid in any of these drinks bypasses the usual cavity-making step of providing sugar to the plaque on teeth which then produce acid which then makes holes in teeth. The acid in these drinks is applied directly to the teeth creating destructive and unsightly cavities.

As far as Soft Drinks are concerned the citrus flavored ones are the most destructive followed by Cola’s with Root Beers generally using malic acid which is milder than Citric of Phosphoric in its evil effects.

Some good advice for keeping your teeth healthy is to limit these drinks to once or twice a week and sip through a straw to avoid direct contact of the acid with enamel. The best advice would be to avoid drinks with these bad actors: citric acid, phosphoric acid, high fructose corn syrup, and reach for old fashioned water. Your teeth will thank you for it.

