

COCKTAIL CONTROVERSY

It has recently been noted that a popular cocktail can erode tooth enamel and give rise to cavities. The Aperol Spritz is an Italian-inspired cocktail that combines Prosecco (a less-expensive alternative to Champagne) and Aperol (an Italian aperitif composed of bitter orange, rhubarb, and other ingredients). As it turns out, drinking too much of this popular cocktail exposes teeth to the residual sugars and acids that sufficiently eat away at enamel to cause what has come to be known as the “prosecco smile.” Of course, there is nothing new in all this, in that dentists and health professionals have long advised against drinking carbonated beverages, which get their fizz from the release of carbon dioxide, which dissolves into carbonic acid.

P.S. With respect to consuming acidic and sugary foods and drinks, moderation is key. It also helps to rinse with water after consuming foods that pose a danger to tooth enamel.

GUM DISEASE’S LINK TO BREAST CANCER

It has already been established that gum disease is an inflammatory condition that can have an adverse impact on the body that goes well beyond the gums. When left unchecked, the bacteria that cause gum disease create deep pockets between the teeth and gums. When this happens, gums may bleed and the bacteria may enter the blood stream and travel to other parts of the body. According to a recent analysis of 200 women, 67 of whom had breast cancer, women with severe gum disease (periodontitis) had a three times greater risk of developing breast cancer. This study suggests that periodontitis can not only lead to tooth loss, but it may have even more potentially greater ill effects.

P.S. Periodontal disease has been linked to heart disease and dementia.

ACCUMULATED WISDOM

“Wisdom” teeth, the third and final set of molars that usually erupt between ages 17 and 21, are located at the farthest corners of the upper and lower dental arches. They derive their popular name from the notion that they erupt when we are more mature. Because there is often no space left for them to occupy, they can become misaligned or impacted. If they do not come in straight, it can be very difficult to floss between the wisdom teeth and the molars next to them. Even worse, misaligned wisdom teeth can damage neighboring teeth, and impacted teeth can lead to the formation of a cyst. For these reasons, misaligned and impacted wisdom teeth should be surgically removed.

P.S. Wisdom teeth that remain in the mouth should be regularly monitored for changes and potential problems.

EASY DOES IT

While it may be difficult to criticize anyone who is conscientious in his or her brushing and flossing habits, some people exert too much force (up to a pound of pressure) on their teeth and gums with their toothbrushes, which can erode enamel and damage gums. According to research, brushing for about two minutes with about five ounces of pressure proves adequate in removing plaque. To gauge five ounces of pressure, push down with your hand on a kitchen portion scale. If you use an electric toothbrush, even less pressure may be necessary, owing to the effectiveness of the high-speed brushing action. The dentist can detect signs of heavy brushing if there is a question.

P.S. Because the bacteria-laden, sticky film known as “plaque” regenerates on teeth every 24 hours, daily brushing and flossing are critical.