



AUSTRALIAN DENTAL
ASSOCIATION INC.

TOOTH

EROSION

Fact Sheet

Tooth Erosion in older Australians

Dental Health Week

Tooth erosion can affect people of all ages. However, advanced tooth erosion is most commonly seen in the elderly.

While dietary acids are the usual causes of tooth erosion in children and teenagers, as a person advances in years reduced saliva production can lead to more severe forms of erosion, which can compromise both oral and general health.

Saliva helps to protect against tooth erosion because it neutralises damaging acids in foods and beverages. If saliva production is compromised, these acids have a greater opportunity to attack tooth enamel. Known as Xerostomia or dry mouth syndrome, the causes of reduced saliva production are varied. Ageing can cause a dry mouth, as can polypharmacy, which is the need for the use of several medications at a time.

Causes

A range of medications, including the following, can lead to reduced saliva production and can cause a dry mouth:

- Cardiovascular medications (diuretics, calcium channel blockers)
- Antidepressants and antipsychotics
- Sedatives
- Central analgesics
- Anti-Parkinson's disease medications
- Anti-allergy medications
- Antacids

Acidic food and beverages that attack the surface of tooth enamel are common contributors to tooth erosion in all age groups. Reduced salivary function increases susceptibility of these foods and drinks, making tooth erosion more likely.

Preventing or minimising tooth erosion

In the case of Xerostomia, keeping the mouth moist is the best way to minimise acid attacks. The following preventative behaviours are some of the other ways to minimise acid attacks:

- Keep well hydrated - take regular sips of water or suck on pieces of ice.
- Finish every meal or snack with water to reduce the acid levels in the mouth.
- Chewing sugar free gum can stimulate saliva flow and rinse acids away.
- Your dentist may recommend a saliva substitute, available from your pharmacy.
- Your dentist, in collaboration with your prescribing doctor, can assess your medications to see if there are alternatives that you can take, which don't impact on saliva production. Never stop taking a medication that you've been prescribed even if you suspect it is causing a dry mouth. Discuss medication side effects and options with your dentist and your prescribing doctor.
- Avoid foods and drinks that are acidic and can exacerbate a dry mouth. These include caffeine, alcohol and carbonated soft drinks.

