

You are what you eat

Did you know that your teeth could be under threat from the acid contained in modern diets?

Everyday food and drinks such as fruits, fruit juices and teas, wine and balsamic vinegar can be highly acidic – and therefore potentially damaging to teeth. When acid comes into contact with teeth, the tooth's hard enamel surface temporarily softens. When we brush our teeth, the enamel can be worn away more easily and become thinner over time. This wearing of enamel, caused by acid in our diet, is known as acid erosion.

An early sign of acid erosion can be that teeth become sensitive to hot, cold or sweet food and drinks. In the long term, acid erosion may visibly affect the tooth's appearance, for example, teeth may show as darker yellow, transparent at the edges or as small cracks at the edges of the teeth.

Top nutritionist Anita Bean examined some modern day diets and has come up with a number of top tips on how you can best protect your teeth from acid erosion.

Answer her simple quiz to find out which type of eater you are.

In the morning you are running late for work. Breakfast should be the most important meal of the day, so you:

- A Grab a cereal bar on the way to work.
- B Sit down to a plate of fruit salad and hot water and a slice of lemon.
- C Prepare a full breakfast of yoghurt, toast and cereal.

At lunchtime, a friend asks if you want to go out for lunch. You answer:

- A No, you've been snacking all morning, so you aren't hungry.
- B Yes, but poke around at a green salad.
- C Yes. You're busy, but you'll be more efficient if you have lunch.

After work, you are meeting your friend at around 8 o'clock to go to the cinema. Do you:

- A Not eat until you get to the cinema, and order a snack to stifle your hunger.
- B Buy a low-calorie sandwich and eat it before you get there.
- C Suggest that you go out for dinner first.



ANITA'S ANSWERS: WHAT KIND OF EATER ARE YOU?



MOSTLY As: THE GRAZER

You rarely sit down to a proper meal and just grab bites to eat when you're hungry. Your tooth enamel is under constant attack from food and drink acids.

Anita says: Try to limit snacking. Replace some acidic snacks with enamel-friendly foods, such as raw vegetable sticks, nuts and

cheese. When you eat fruit, follow with a glass of water to help wash away the acid, or chew sugar-free gum to help stimulate saliva and neutralise the acid.

MOSTLY Bs: THE DAILY DIETER

You're careful about what you eat and losing weight is your ultimate goal. Living on a diet of salads with low-fat dressings, you avoid dairy products, although they can help to neutralise food acids.

Anita says: If you

start the day with something acidic, like juice or hot water and lemon, avoid brushing teeth straight after, when tooth enamel is at its softest. Wait at least one hour, or brush before breakfast. Finish off a meal with dairy products, as they help to neutralise acids. If you're dieting, just eat low fat varieties of dairy products.

MOSTLY Cs: THE THREE MEALER

Because you eat regularly and don't snack, you are

much less likely to suffer from acid erosion, as your teeth have time to recover between meals. **Anita says:** Finish off meals with dairy products, in order to help restore the natural balance of acid and alkaline in your mouth. Brush your teeth before a meal, or at least an hour after eating. Use a medium-soft toothbrush and brush gently. Ask your dentist about acid erosion.

