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The truth about sports drink and pop

Sip on pop or sports drink and you could be cultivating cavities and more.

By Dr. Susan Maples

Q: My 17 year old son just loves sports drinks, and so does his football coach. I have just noticed some white streaks on his front teeth, near the gum line. Could this be related?

A: Sadly, it sounds like decalcification (beginning cavities that are permanent scars). Sports drinks can be just as harmful as pop or juice. It's the *frequency* of consumption that poses a danger. Take pop-sipping, for example. If you drink pop (or sports drinks or juice) several times a day....disaster! On the other hand, if you drink a gallon of sugar pop each day (yikes!), all within ten minutes, you would likely not get cavities. Well...obesity, osteoporosis, and kidney stones maybe, but not cavities.

I tell kids the "bacteria-bugs" (plaque) *eat* the sugar and then *pee* (produce acid) on their teeth. It's graphic I know, but they get the picture! Did you know it takes almost an hour for the saliva to re-neutralize that acidity? Also your saliva factory shuts down at night so if you consume sweets within an hour of bedtime you are setting yourself up for an acid-bath all night long.

Here's a visual experiment to do with kids: Take an empty (clear) pop or sports drink bottle and fill it with the equivalent of white sugar. (Five grams (5g) of sugar make a teaspoon.) It's a shocker!

For years I suggested that "sippers" just switch to "diet" drinks. That eliminates the sugar problem but excuse me....have you seen all the chemicals in the ingredient list? As a mother myself, I am concerned about the *habitual* (not occasional) ingestion of high-tech chemicals. As a toddler my son had the "one finger rule" for our grocery cart: If he couldn't cover the ingredients with the width of his index finger it wasn't going in the cart. When he started to read he would pick up a bag of junk food and grimace, perplexed by all the strange words that spilled out under his one-finger. Now he's 15 and nutrition-aware.

It's never too early to work with children on making choices. Try making a list together of tooth-friendly treats versus non-tooth friendly ones and visit the grocery store together.