

Your guide to the latest news and views

Hot off the press!

This month Professor Andrew Eder gets fruity and considers the oral health implications of the government's 'five-a-day' campaign

In the last decade, the provision of bariatric surgery has greatly increased in response to the rising prevalence of obesity in the population.

But while this is an effective treatment modality, it can have consequences for patients' oral health.

Recently published evidence indicates that patients who have undergone bariatric surgery, such as the fitting of a gastric band, may be at an increased risk of tooth wear. This is due to both intrinsic and extrinsic sources of acid, which have an erosive effect on the tooth surface.

The intrinsic sources, gastro-oesophageal reflux and vomiting, are commonly observed post-surgery. The extrinsic sources present in the form of regularly consumed, flavoursome liquidated foods of high nutritional value, such as the fruit smoothies that are advocated following surgery.

Low absorption of nutrients by the intestine can also result in reduced salivary flow, which may further exacerbate enamel loss.

Both of these sources can also contribute to the development of carious lesions and hypersensitivity. This highlights the importance of research-led practice, contemporaneous medical history taking and a holistic approach to dental treatment (such as using diet sheets, for example).

The government's much publicised 'five-a-day' campaign is based on advice

from the World Health Organisation, which recommends eating a minimum of 400g (approximately five pieces) of fruit and vegetables a day to lower the risk of experiencing serious health problems, such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes (type II) and obesity.

While it is imperative that this guidance is widely promoted, as dental professionals we must be mindful of the choices our patients are making and the ways in which these impact on their oral health.

Selecting fruit – especially fruits with a very low pH, such as citrus – more often than vegetables can lead to tooth wear. Frequency is key and consuming fruit regularly as a snack, on its own, can cause significant erosion to the tooth surfaces, as saliva is the only buffering mechanism.

It is not just whole fruit that can cause acid erosion, of course; herbal teas, especially fresh lemon tea, can be damaging, particularly if sipped over lengthy periods on a daily basis.

In addition, faster lifestyles have incentivised the development of smoothies,



thickies and 'health' drinks, which often include more than one of your five a day in an 'on-the-go' formulation.

It is therefore important to ask your patients about their diet, in an open and non-judgemental way, particularly if you notice signs of enamel erosion.

Armed with information, you can then give personalised, realistic and targeted guidance to ensure their healthy lifestyle isn't also compromising their oral health. **PD**

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