

Effects of diet changes

A common concern is "my teeth have become very sensitive lately", or "Why have my teeth started to break?" A recent discussion with a patient for a second opinion revealed some misconceptions about how our teeth are meant to function and why problems start when they do. In this patient's case, it was a bewildering combination of problems and perceptions that caused the patient to question what was happening.

Most patients understand why fillings need to be replaced and what can happen if problems are not corrected. What patients usually do not understand is that some problems attributed to "old fillings" can be related to recent changes in diet, brushing habits, stress, aging, or more involved tooth (or even jaw joint) problems such as hypersensitivity, occlusal awareness, deteriorating nerve tissue.

A recent issue is the movement back to a diet based on raw foods, vegetables, and nuts. These foods require more chewing. Probably good for you, but this is a new gig for your chompers. Your teeth have not been subjected to the greater chewing forces. We have adapted to a diet of mostly processed foods, which leave less opportunity to develop a number of chewing problems--as long as we do stay on that softer diet.

Another common problem is acidic foods and drinks. Tomatoes and orange juice are normally perceived as healthy items that you can't have too much. Along that line is sports drinks. Sometimes considered to be a better option than colas, but usually as much or more acid. Acidic foods and drinks can demineralize the surfaces of the teeth, especially the root surfaces, and lead to sensitivity in individual teeth or groups of teeth. Your dentist should be able to help you determine if any of these factors apply to your individual situation.