

Last week a patient came into the office for a routine cleaning and complained of some recent extreme sensitivity. After an exam and discussion I asked if there had been any recent changes in her diet, such as more acidic foods? It turns out she had been eating a lot of fresh tomatoes lately. I explained how high acidity can sensitize exposed root surfaces and what can be done to counter the effects.

One of the effects of acidic food and drinks that sometimes accompanies the sensitivity is excessive wear. Sensitivity can usually be reversed, but tooth wear cannot. Acids can demineralize the enamel and dentin surfaces and lead to rapid breakdown of the teeth.

That is the reason bulimia and gastroesophageal reflux (stomach acids) can ravage teeth so quickly. But the same effect happens to a lesser degree with citrus, vinegar (marinated and cured foods and salad dressings), some colas, even some wines. The effect of acidic saliva on enamel erosion was revealed in a recent dental journal report.

The enamel layer on the outside of the tooth is usually very strong, but once that layer has been removed the inner dentin layer is exposed which is relatively soft. When the dentin layer begins to wear it starts a cycle of breaking enamel, wearing more dentin, etc. The dentin layer is also much more susceptible to decay. These situations can be very difficult to repair and there are many other factors to consider, but the sooner you deal with the problem, the easier the solution.

High levels of acidity are also possibly linked to periodontal (gum) disease, and undoubtedly a lot of other problems we have not yet identified. So, as everyone emphasizes these days- be very aware of the effects of your diet. And keep up with your regular dental check-ups.