

12 Best & Worst Foods for Your Teeth

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If coffee, cigarettes, red wine and food have left their mark on your teeth, you're not alone. "The rule of thumb is anything that can stain a white T-shirt can stain your teeth too," says Marc Liechtung, DMD, principal in New York-based Manhattan Dental Arts, a practice that specializes in cosmetic and restorative dentistry.

While you certainly don't have to give up your morning cup of coffee or your evening glass of red wine, if your teeth are discoloring, you might want to consider consuming less and thoroughly rinsing your mouth with water after you're done eating or drinking, according to Dr. Liechtung.

Dr. Liechtung's dirty dozen foods that stain your teeth include:

1. Black Coffee and Black Tea—The darker the beverage, the more staining that can occur. So try adding a little extra milk to lighten the color and reduce the staining effect.
2. Wine—Both red and white wines, if taken in excess, will stain your teeth. Although red stains, white wine's acidic composition actually etches tiny grooves in your teeth, making them more porous and more easily stained.
3. Colas and Sports Drinks—Because they are so highly acidic, they help promote staining by other foods.
4. Berries—Blueberries, raspberries, cranberries, cherries and other berries, although excellent for your overall health, can stain your teeth. So, if you're crazy for berries, be sure to rinse out your mouth thoroughly with water after each indulgence.
5. Sauces—Soy sauce and tomato sauce, as well as other deeply colored sauces, are believed to have significant staining potential.
6. Juice—Grape, pomegranate and cranberry are highly pigmented and can cause staining. So, if you must imbibe, try rinsing your mouth out with water or drinking juices through a straw, thereby bypassing the fronts of your teeth.
7. Pickles and ketchup—These acidic foods are good at opening up the pores of your tooth enamel allowing for easy staining.

8. Balsamic Vinegar—While great on a salad, it can cause havoc to your teeth. If you must, try it on lettuce, which has a natural ability to provide a protective film over your teeth.

9. Candy-Sweets contain teeth-staining coloring agents. If your tongue turns a funny color, there's a good chance that your teeth will too.

10. Beets—Now here's a vegetable that could put a powerful stain in your t-shirt, so, like all foods that stain, moderation is called for with this one.

11. Curry—Although great on Indian food, this yellow-staining food flavoring can be harsh on teeth. So make sure to rinse thoroughly after indulging.

12. Popsicles—Did you ever look at your tongue after you've finished your fruity, sugary pop? Not only does it color your tongue, but also your teeth. Plus, it has an added double whammy negative effect because of all of that sugar.

But, did you know that Mother Nature has some natural solutions to whitening your pearly whites? Here is Dr. Liechtung's list of tooth-whitening foods:

12 Tooth Whitening Foods

1. Apples, pears and guavas increase salivary production which flushes away stains over time.

2. Cauliflower and cucumbers also help to increase salivary production, the natural way to flush away stains.

3. Cheese is rich in protein, calcium and phosphorus, all of which can help safeguard against the acids in your mouth.

4. Sesame seeds help scrub away plaque. (Read more reasons to love sesame seeds.)

5. Salmon provides calcium and vitamin D, nutrients needed for healthy bones and teeth.

6. Shiitake mushrooms help inhibit bacteria from growing in your mouth.

7. Onions help reduce bacteria that cause tooth decay.

8. Pineapple acts as a natural stain remover.

9. Green vegetables like broccoli, lettuce and spinach contains iron which helps form an acid-resistant film or barrier that can help scrub away stubborn stains and protect the enamel on your teeth.

10. Ginger acts as an anti-inflammatory to support healthy mouth tissue.

11. Carrots contain vitamin A, which is needed for healthy tooth enamel.

12. Basil is a natural antibiotic that reduces bacteria in the mouth.

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