

Beauty

A Healthier, Brighter Smile

BY ALISA HRUSTIC

Your smile helps other people see your joy, trustworthiness, and confidence—making it at least as big a beauty statement as a manicure or blowout. But there are plenty of sneaky ways you may be damaging it, from the foods you eat to your brushing method. As you age, you become more susceptible to tooth decay and gum disease, which can have a major effect on the health and appearance of your teeth. Try these simple tips to keep those whites pearly.

TAKE A LOOK AT YOUR PLATE

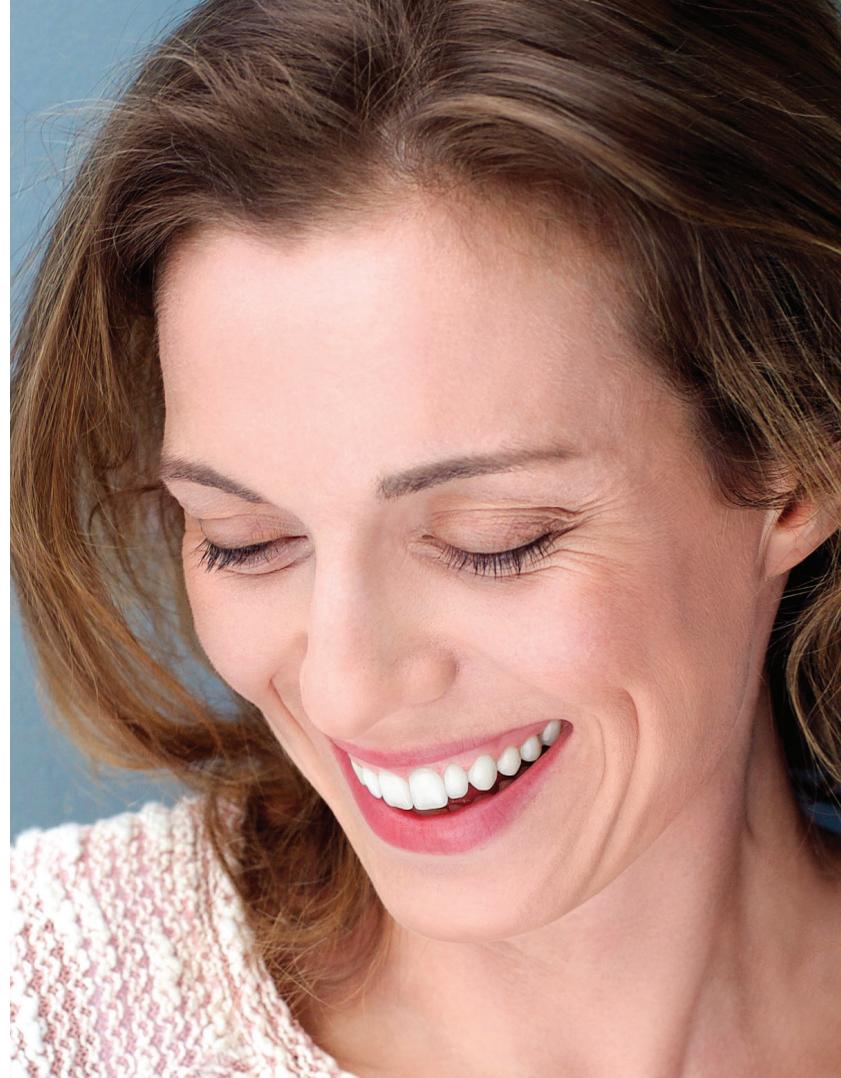
A host of foods can damage teeth—yes, even some healthy ones. “Foods with dark coloring such as blueberries, dark tea, coffee, and red wine can create superficial staining on teeth that can accumulate over time,” says Julie Cho, D.M.D., a dentist in New York City and a member

of the American Dental Association. Acidic foods like citrus fruits and bubbly sodas can also cause damage, as they strip your enamel (the protective covering on your teeth) over time, leading to sensitivity, yellowing, and cavities.

That doesn’t mean these foods and drinks have to lose their place in your life (after all, berries and citrus are powerful for your overall health!). After an acidic meal, just sip a bit of milk or enjoy a few cubes of cheese—foods loaded with calcium can help neutralize acids so they do less damage. If you’re drinking something dark or carbonated, use a straw so your teeth make less contact with it. And make sure you go in for a pro cleaning every six months, Cho says; your hygienist can remove surface-level stains with scalers and polishers.

CUT BACK ON SUGAR

Your sweet tooth may be stirring up more trouble than you realize. “The bacteria in your mouth will feed on sugar and produce acids,” Cho explains.



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This process erodes your natural tooth structure, including enamel and dentin (the part of your tooth just below the enamel). “To give you an idea of how destructive this is, enamel is the hardest substance in your body—harder than bone!” says Cho. You can still

enjoy your favorite treats, but moderation is key. Research suggests that limiting your sugar intake to less than 10% of your daily calories can help slash your risk of tooth decay. (Remember, sneaky sugar sources like syrup and honey count too.)



CLEAN 'EM LIKE YOU MEAN IT

You know how to brush—or do you? Start with a soft toothbrush or an electric one and a

toothpaste that works for your teeth, whether it's a whitening product or one formulated to deal with sensitivity. Then “the key is to be sure you access all the surfaces of the teeth, not just the chewing surfaces but the outsides, the insides, and along the gumline or the necks of the teeth,” Cho says. “This area is often missed.” Brush gently (never scrub!) in a circular motion, getting into the nooks and crannies of every tooth—even the ones farthest back. Ideally, you should spend at least two minutes brushing. After flossing, you can swish with mouthwash for extra brightening and bacteria-fighting power.

PREVENTION PICKS: Sensodyne Pronamel Gentle Whitening Toothpaste, \$6, drugstores; Colgate Optic White Whitening Mouthwash, \$6, drugstores

TRY OTC WHITENERS AT HOME

When it comes to bleaching at home, “over-the-counter products work, but the key is consistency,” Cho says.

“Whitening will impact your natural teeth the most and has less effect on any restorations such as crowns, bridges, or fillings.” Before you start to use whitening products, make sure your teeth are clean (plaque buildup will just get in the way).

If your whitening toothpaste or rinse isn't cutting it, Cho suggests trying a product like Crest Whitestrips, which contain hydrogen peroxide, the most commonly used bleaching ingredient. (Sensitive to it? Look for a product with potassium nitrate on the label.) Once you commit, it's crucial to keep it up for 30 minutes daily for two weeks. If that doesn't work, “you can try something like Opalescence trays, which are impregnated with a hydrogen peroxide gel and are molded around your teeth,” she says. These are typically carried by dentists' offices, and you'll want to use them for about 20 minutes a day for 10 days.

PREVENTION PICK: Crest 3D Whitestrips Original Teeth Whitening Kit, \$70, drugstores

SEE A PRO

“Keep in mind that OTC bleaching agents will remove only superficial staining and that the results are variable,” Cho says. If you're not seeing the whitening impact you want at home,



your dentist can hook you up with in-office bleaching treatments, which can work faster. If you're not happy with your smile in general, you should be able to tell your dentist exactly what's bothering you so they can help guide you. “For example,” Cho says, “do you feel that your smile is too gummy? Do you not like the shade, shape, or size of your teeth?” Depending on how you want to proceed, you may be referred to a specialist, such as a periodontist or an orthodontist, to help you get the look you're going for.

DON'T FORGET YOUR LIPS!

They frame your teeth, after all. Beyond using a lip balm with SPF 30 regularly (it keeps your pucker looking smooth and youthful!), lipcolor can

play a major role in the brightness of your smile. Mai Quynh, a celebrity makeup artist in Los Angeles, recommends going bold with red. Stick to options with a blue base (cool undertone) rather than warmer reds that skew too orange (warm undertone). “If you're adventurous, you can go darker and try a vampy shade like a deep plum,” Quynh says.

PREVENTION PICKS: Armani Beauty Lip Maestro Liquid Matte Lipstick in 400, \$38, sephora.com; MAC Retro Matte Lipstick in Ruby Woo, \$19, ulta.com



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