


Health Care

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ROBERT H. CRANFIELD D.C.

The survey shows:

Halton Hills children have fewer cavities than those in Milton

The results of a 2001-2002 dental survey conducted by the Halton Region Health Department has shown that there's significant difference in the prevalence of dental cavities between Milton and other Halton municipalities such as Halton Hills.

"Overall, the proportion of children have dental decay and the number of teeth with cavities is lower in communities with a fluoridated water supply," said Dr. Bob Nosal, Halton's Medical Officer of Health.

A total of 1,522 children aged five, seven or nine years of age participated in the survey.

- Nearly half of the children— 48 per cent— had evidence of dental cavities, an average of 1.8 teeth affected.
- 15 per cent had bleeding gums
- 5 per cent had urgent dental conditions
- 18 per cent had fluorosis (patchy white fleck on teeth that occur on homologous teeth and may be attributable to excessive fluoride ingestion during early childhood years (birth to age 6).
- The proportion of children have cavities and the average number of teeth affected are lower in fluoridated communities: 53 per cent in Halton Hills were caries immune (never experienced cavities), 52 per cent in Burlington and 58 per cent in Oakville. However, the well-based urban water supply to Milton is not fluoridated and only 43 per cent of the children there were caries immune.
- Halton Hills children had an average number of 1.7 teeth affected by cavities.

In the 2001-2002 school year, 16,622 children were screened, of which 1,348 children were identified needing dental treatment. Sixty per cent required regular fillings; 40 per cent required urgent care.

The distribution of children requiring dental treatment followed a broad pattern corresponding to areas of lower average income.

October is Dental Health Care Month

Are you wearing your teeth away?

These days, most of us are very concerned about our dental health and we try hard to prevent tooth decay and gum disease. However, tooth erosion or wearing of the enamel is becoming a more common problem today as people are keeping their teeth longer. Since dental erosion is irreversible and difficult to treat, prevention is the best policy.

Although a certain amount of tooth wear is to be expected with age, it is important to recognize when teeth are wearing abnormally and to understand why this is happening. Usually, dental erosion is related to a number of factors, but one of the most common causes is too much acidic substance in the diet, both in food and drinks. Consuming large quantities of soft drinks can be very harmful. Acidic foods, including some citrus fruits and vinegar-based substances, if eaten excessively can destroy the enamel.

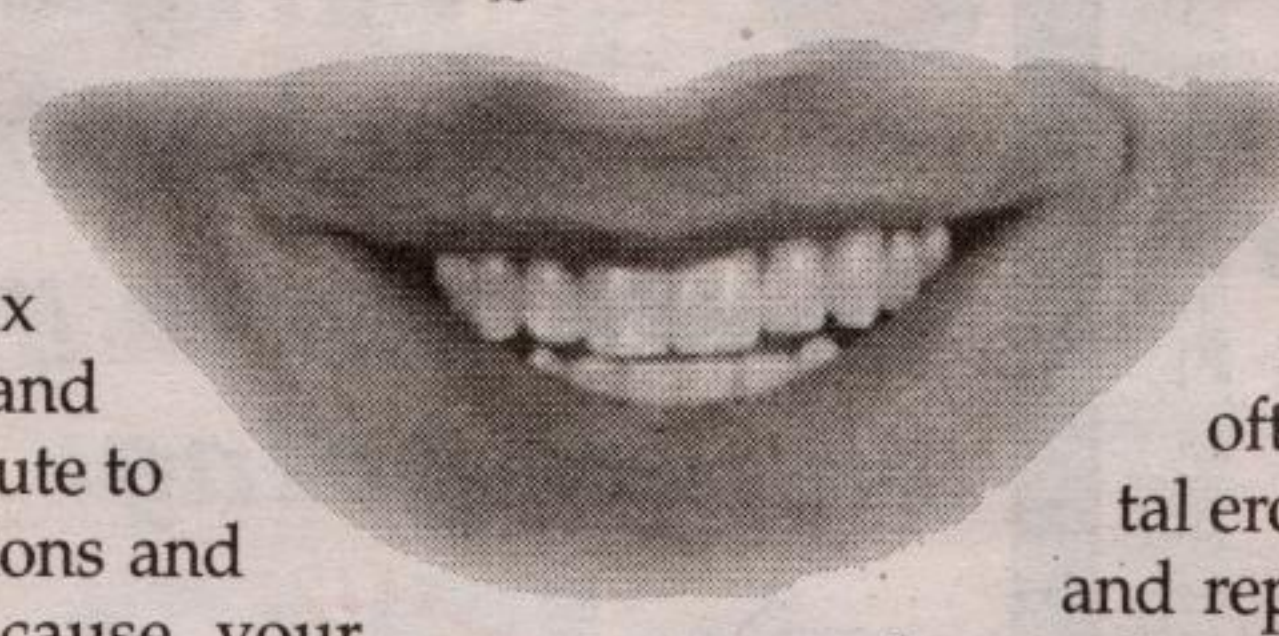
Conditions where persistent vomiting can occur, such as pregnancy and bulimia (an eating disorder), also contribute to dental erosion. Acid reflux from chronic indigestion, hiatus hernia and alcoholism are other factors that contribute to loss of enamel. Certain medical conditions and drug treatments, especially if they cause your mouth to be dry, can lead to tooth wear as well.

Some types of work increase the risk of tooth erosion because they expose workers to higher levels of acidic or abrasive substances. A chef or wine taster may experience this as could industrial workers exposed to acidic or abrasive chemicals.

People who often grind their teeth or brush improperly can also experience tooth wear. Hard toothbrushes and abrasive toothpaste can also be harmful and they should be avoided.

Tooth erosion can affect the quality of your smile because the enamel wears prematurely. Your teeth may become sensitive as enamel is lost and in severe cases the dentin becomes exposed. Dentin is the sensitive layer found under the enamel layer of your teeth. This can be

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painful, especially when eating or drinking cold items. As the teeth wear, they can become brittle and may be more likely to break; your ability to speak properly could also be affected.


Prevention is the best approach, but if you suspect that your teeth are wearing more than normal it is very important to identify the problem and correct it. The cause can be controlled to prevent any more damage. Make sure you have a healthy, balanced diet and avoid sugary and acidic foods and drinks.

See your dentist or hygienist regularly for checkups, as they are often the first to recognize signs of dental erosion. It may be necessary to build up and repair teeth if there is a severe enamel loss and tooth sensitivity. In some cases, crowns (caps) may be required to improve appearance. Practising good oral hygiene and proper brushing with a soft toothbrush and non-abrasive fluoride toothpaste is key. This may help to add minerals to the damaged enamel.

While dental erosion may not be a major problem for most of us, it is becoming more common. Therefore, we need to be aware of the risk factors for erosion and reduce them if possible. Prevention is the best cure.

For more information about preventing abnormal tooth wear, call Halton Region Health Department, 905-825-6060, ext. 7697 or 1-866-442-5866 or visit www.region.halton.on.ca/health


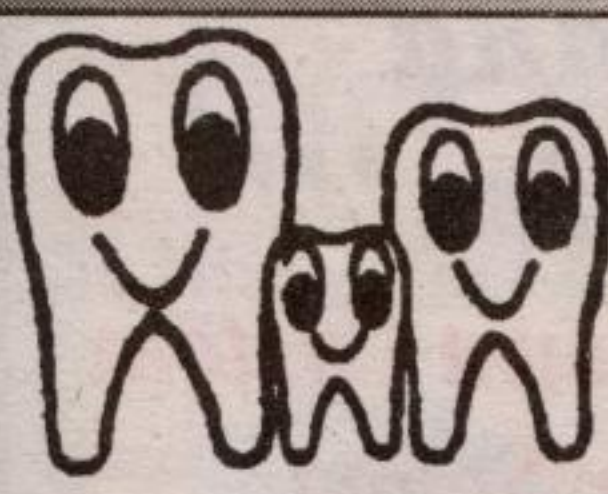
Health Notes is a monthly column prepared by the staff of the Halton Region Health Department.



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