



# Bite

## Word of mouth

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Featured

# Coconut water and your teeth

Everything you eat and drink affects the health of your body and your mouth, but some of the most concentrated and destructive combinations of acid and sugar are found in the beverages that many of us consume every day. In recent years, coconut water has become an extremely popular substitute for traditional electrolyte replacement beverages. Sports and energy drinks certainly do tend to be highly acidic, full of sugar, and enhanced with artificial flavours and colours. So how does the trendy coconut water beverage stack up against our teeth?

### Coconut Water—nature’s sports drink?

Early claims of coconut water companies suggested that coconut water was equal or superior to traditional sports beverages in electrolyte replacement. That still may be true of coconut water that is consumed straight from the coconut. However, commercially available coconut waters continue to test with sodium levels far below what is required for adequate rehydration after strenuous exercise.

Accredited practicing dietician Julie Gilbert says “potassium and sodium are the key nutrients that contribute to fluid balance; if you add potassium to a drink after you’ve exercised, it can help you retain that fluid, but the benefits aren’t as great as with sodium.” More importantly, Gilbert also points out, most of us don’t

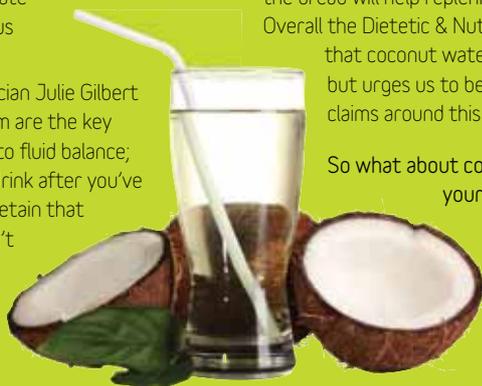
sweat enough through regular exercise to need to rehydrate with anything other than water. Sports drinks are mainly for elite athletes or those who exercise hard for more than an hour every day.

Even if you sweat a lot, or have been exercising for over an hour outside in the heat, Gilbert recommends a big glass of water and a small snack, such as a piece of toast with vegemite: “You’ll retain the water and the bread will help replenish your carbohydrates”.<sup>1</sup> Overall the Dietetic & Nutrition community report

that coconut water has some great qualities but urges us to be wary of the overblown claims around this drink.

### So what about coconut water and your teeth?

In order to assess the affect that coconut water has on our teeth, we must review the factors that cause



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### This month...

At Bite, we treat our patients as our friends—friends who have lifestyles, habits and diets that change over time. That’s why we take the time during your check-up visits to review lifestyle factors that may affect your oral health, and discuss trends with up-to-date evidence.

In this month’s feature article, we discuss the popular beverage of the moment—coconut water. More specifically we explore the effects that this drink has on our teeth.

Last month I mentioned that we have a new hygienist in our team so this month we giving her a proper introduction—please welcome Helen!

Finally, Jenna has a tip for the best way to get around those beverage treats.

Dr Simon Franks



> continued

damage to our teeth. Disease-causing oral bacteria thrive in a sugary, acidic environment. Enamel erosion and decay are most often caused by an excess of these two dietary elements. However, even without the presence of pathogenic oral bacteria, acid alone can erode tooth enamel and eventually destroy your teeth.

Enamel erosion begins at a pH level of 5.5 or lower. Acidic foods and beverages will certainly change the pH of your mouth for varying amounts of time, but the most destructive source of acid in the mouth comes from the bacteria itself. When oral bacteria feed on sugar and other simple carbohydrates, they release acid as a by-product. As long as the bacteria are continuously provided with the simple sugars they need, the pH of your mouth will continue to become more acidic; and this cycle of acidity becomes more and more entrenched.<sup>2</sup>

Coconut water has a pH of 6.10-7.0, so, from an oral acidity perspective, coconut water does stack up as a suitable beverage option.

However, coconut water does also contain approximately 6% of natural sugars—even when drunk straight from the coconut. In fact, of the total sugar content, pure coconut water contains 40% glucose, 25% sucrose and 35% fructose which are the types of simple sugars that feed the bacteria to cause tooth decay.

It's also worth noting many of the commercial brands of coconut water can be high in added sugar—and therefore kilojoules, especially if they contain added fruit and flavours.

## So is it good or bad? Putting it all together

With that all being said, this doesn't mean that you have to avoid pre-packaged coconut water altogether—just don't drink too much! Or better still crack open a green coconut yourself and drink that, instead.

Coconut water is certainly a better choice for consumption over sports and energy drinks from a dental perspective but remaining aware of their sugar content is important. When choosing a coconut water to replace a traditional sports drink, remember these tips:

- Avoid the flavoured varieties especially the acidic flavours (lemon, lime). Read the labels, and choose unsweetened brands.
- Avoid grazing and sipping on coconut water over long periods—this regular exposure to sugar will lead to tooth decay.
- Coconut water shouldn't replace hydration with plain water!

With the risk of sounding boring and very un-hip—the best daily beverage you can drink for the health of your body is plain, unflavoured water. When you choose to drink something else, however, please consider the effects that beverage may be having on your teeth.

At Bite Dental, we take the time during check-up visits to review lifestyle factors that may affect your oral health.

## References:

1. White, C. ABC Health and Wellbeing. 'Coconut water: miracle drink or health fad?' URL <http://www.abc.net.au/health/thepulse/stories/2013/07/23/3808325.htm>
2. Health Centred Dentistry. 'Drinks that eat your teeth' URL <http://drmartharich.com/resources/drinks-that-eat-teeth/>

Celebrate everyday heroes. Let us know if you have a cause you'd like us to shout about.

## Healthy Hygiene Hints

### Are you a sucker?

When you are allowing yourself those sweet and sour beverage treats—drink them through straw to bypass your teeth.

Note that this does not completely eliminate the its effect in your mouth and the environment will still be affected, but this does help to prevent as much sugar and acid passing directly to the tooth surfaces.



Jenna

## Bite news

### Welcome Helen

Helen obtained a degree in Oral Health Therapy from the University of Queensland. Alongside three years of study, Helen was a dental assistant in private practice and also completed some part-time work at Bite Dental. We loved Helen so much that she now returns to Bite Dental Studios as a qualified Oral Health Therapist.

Helen's own regular visits to the school dental clinic intrigued her to a career in dentistry. Having been on the receiving end and facing dental anxiety first hand, Helen strives to provide you with a comfortable and pleasant experience through her friendliness and care.

In her spare time, Helen volunteers with Tzu Chi Foundation providing oral health care to refugees. She also enjoys exploring cafes and finding the best 'brunch' eats.



## Community

### Shout out to Ian

Ian is a long term patient of Bite and over time we've seen him achieve many impressive and challenging accomplishments. This year he has published his first book "Surefire Guide to Small Business Success" and we're proud to support him! Ian is a chartered accountant and current managing director of Value Beyond accounting firm in East Brisbane. Ask us to find out more.



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