

## Wine and teeth revisited

13 Oct 2008 by Susan Cooper

**11 Jul 2012** - I have just received the following supplement to the original article below that we published almost four years ago about how wine drinkers can best look after their teeth. (This may have been prompted by the terrifying state of my teeth in [this video](#) shot at the recent tasting of [Julia's 50 Great Portuguese Wines](#).)

A frequently asked question is 'is there anything I can do or use to prevent [dental] erosion?' The advice usually given is: cut down the amount and frequency of consumption of wine, especially white wine, carbonated drinks, fruit and fruit juices, and pickled products, all of which are the main dietary sources of acid. Use Sensodyne Pronamel toothpaste (or similar product). Rinse the mouth with water after having acidic food or drink. Milk and cheese help to neutralise acids. Chewing sugar-free gum helps to increase the saliva flow which also helps to neutralise acids. Drink through a straw, which helps acids to bypass the teeth, and do not swish acidic drinks around the mouth.' That last bit of advice is of course no good for wine drinkers!

Erosion of enamel may cause sensitivity of the teeth when consuming hot, cold or sweet foods and drink. Over time the teeth may appear more yellow, and be more prone to chipping and of course tooth decay.

The best advice is to visit the dentist and hygienist regularly. There are many causes for 'enamel wear', including the way you brush your teeth. There are many new techniques and products available for treating sensitivity and restoring eroded enamel using products such as bonded composite resin.

**13 Oct 2008** - I met wine-loving dental hygienist Susan Cooper at my [wine day at Ballymaloe House](#) in Ireland recently. One of the many topics we touched on was that difficult interstice: wine and teeth. I know purple pagers are concerned about this topic since the last time we touched on it [here](#), admittedly back in 2004, there was considerable interest. Susan has kindly set out the relevant issues below.

There are main two issues which are relevant to wine and teeth: erosion of the enamel from the acidic properties of wine, and staining from red wine.

Erosion can sometimes be seen as a translucency of the front teeth, and often teeth may become sensitive. Saliva can help to neutralize and clear acids from the mouth; it also helps to remineralise enamel. However, there is a limit above which saliva loses its capacity to remineralise and dental erosion occurs. It should also be taken into account that alcohol has a dehydrating effect which reduces salivary flow, and wine is generally left in contact with the teeth for a long time as it is swished around the mouth before swallowing. In order to minimise the damage, it is important not to brush the teeth immediately after drinking or tasting wine as the enamel may be soft and easily damaged by brushing. It is probably advisable to wait at least one hour. It may help to eat a neutralising food such as cheese. There are some new products on the market which are designed to help protect against acid erosion such as Sensodyne Pronamel, which helps with sensitivity and may also help to remineralise and harden acid-softened enamel.

Stain is a cosmetic issue and does not harm the enamel. However, it can be unsightly and difficult to remove. The porosity of an individual's enamel will affect the amount and intensity of the stain, and composite filling material (white fillings) are prone to stain. Using a whitening toothpaste may help to remove stain. These toothpastes do not whiten teeth; they contain stain removers which help to restore the enamel to its original colour. Some people find that using an electric toothbrush helps to remove more stain than a manual toothbrush. Rinsing the mouth with water may help to cut down on the amount of stain, and at tasting sessions you will do no damage by gently wiping the teeth with a soft tissue. However, it's best to wait for at least one hour before brushing to limit damage to enamel.

The best advice I can give would be to visit the dental hygienist on a 3-4 monthly basis. The stain can then be professionally removed, and up-to-date advice offered regarding new products to combat stain and erosion. Whitening treatments are available but these need to be discussed with the hygienist or dentist.

Just a quick note regarding alcohol and mouthwash [I think this comment was inspired by my comment that, after years of using regular Listerine instead of wine-unfriendly minty toothpastes when brushing teeth prior to tasting wine. I had recently been warned off it by my dental hygienist because it contains alcohol - JR]: While alcohol abuse is associated

with oral cancer, a recent review of published scientific literature has shown that topical alcohol in mouthwashes itself is not associated with the development of oral cancer. It is very difficult to determine the exact role of alcohol in oral cancer as many individuals with a high alcohol intake also tend to have a high tobacco use.