Since 1977 we have observed some startling patterns on the effect dieting has on our teeth. Today, because we are more health-minded than ever, more people are taking steps to control weight and keep healthy - measures which could have a devastating impact on our teeth.

Fosomax and Tums
Osteoporosis, weak bones, and calcium deficiency has women supplementing their diet. Although calcium is essential for healthy bones - women may want to choose supplements that are low in sugar, like Sugarfree Tums. But even with sugarless tablets it is best to brush after chewing them.

The Frequent Nibbler
This is the most common and - from a dental standpoint - most damaging style of dieting that we encounter. In an effort to control appetite, the frequent nibbler replaces large portions of high fat foods with many portions of high carb foods, like small crackers or even fruits throughout the day. Pregnant women who get nauseous when they eat large meals are also forced to eat many small meals. On Weight Watchers, 6 Melba toast or Saltines = 1 bread. Many of our patients find it very satisfying to keep a pack of crackers or pretzels or other starchy snack in their pocketbook. This allows them to eat the crackers one at a time over a period of several hours. As far as their calorie count, they only had one bread. But as far as their teeth, they have had six separate meals. Each time they have one of these mini meals, new bacteria is converted into tooth-destroying acid and bone destroying toxins.

Coffee, Tea, Soda or Water with Lemon
Another famous diet habit, especially for men, is the continuous consumption of coffee or tea with sugar. Realizing that regular soda is loaded with sugar, some of our patients drink diet soda all day! They don’t realize that diet soda is high in tooth decaying acid. A favorite aid for the serious dieter is hot or cold water with lemon. We have seen many patients with severe tooth erosion as a result. These acids are strong enough to melt away the hard enamel covering of your teeth forever. This erosion is not reversible. Once you’ve lost the enamel, it’s gone.

The Candy Man and the Candy Lady
Every 3-year-old that comes to our office will tell you - if you eat too much candy you get cavities. Unfortunately many of our adult patients forget that important rule. Many of our patients use sucking candies similar to the way that others use pretzels or crackers. They will keep a pack or handful in their purse or sports jacket. The candy companies are notorious for misleading you right into a root canal. Many candies are promoted as “low calorie” – even though they are all sugar. It’s only because sugar is relatively low in calories that they can fool you. What about Ricola cough drops, Luden’s, Smith brothers and all the other “medicated” cough drops and breath mints? Sugar and more sugar!

It’s not only Gummy Bears that stick to your teeth
Things that stick to your teeth have more time to do damage. Many health conscious mothers send their children to school with raisins, dried fruit or “all natural” fruit leather. These snacks really stick. But you may not realize that starchy foods are also sticky, in a different way. Because they are pasty, foods such as crackers or dry breakfast cereal, will stick to the biting surface and between the teeth. Don’t Fool yourself, follow the advice in this article, get regular checkups, brush, floss and take your teeth seriously.

Dr. Doueck has practiced restorative dentistry in the community for over 30 years and has taken over 1000 hours of advanced training. He is a clinical consultant to the Dental Advisor, a monthly publication.