

The trouble with teeth

Foods and drinks other than coffee, tea can cause stains

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MOST of us are probably aware that coffee and tea can stain our teeth. But did you also know that seemingly innocuous foods such as fruit juices, blueberries, cherries and even curry can leave their mark on your pearly whites?

"The easiest way to think of it is this: If a food or beverage can leave permanent stains on your clothes or carpet, it can also stain your teeth," said Dr Phang Hui Jing, a dental surgeon with dental group Team GPA.

Teeth are porous and made up of hollow tube-like structures called dentin tubules.

"Teeth stains occur when the enamel (surface of the teeth) picks up stains from food and beverages through the dentin tubules," explained Dr Phang.

That means food such as tomato sauce, balsamic vinegar, soy sauce and red wine can tarnish your teeth. According to Dr Chong Kai Chuan, director for Q&M Dental Institute, red wine is one of the worst culprits.

"Acidic food and beverages such as carbonated drinks and red wine erode and roughen the surface of the tooth, increasing the pick-up rate of stains from other food substances," he said.

But don't be too quick to point your finger at your dietary habits. Poor dental hygiene and accumulated dental plaque also contribute to stains.

Said Dr Phang: "Many teeth stains – especially the yellow-brown to dark brown ones – are actually caused by



Foods that can stain your teeth include varieties of berries.

pigments embedded in plaque that has become coloured from the interaction with food debris, wine or other sources."

Luckily, extrinsic stains caused by food and drinks are usually reversible. Both dentists said such stains often respond well to good oral care – this includes twice-daily brushing and flossing – as well as professional cleaning and whitening treatments.

Using a straw to drink can also help to reduce your teeth's exposure to stain-inducing beverages, advised Dr Phang.

"Be wise about what you eat or drink. When indulging in food and beverages that can cause staining, finish them in one or two sittings rather than eat or sip them throughout the day. And brush your teeth after that," said Dr Phang.

But Dr Chong said there isn't really a foolproof prevention method. "Unless you don't eat or drink, there is no way to prevent such stains. They are not exactly a bad thing – they serve as a reminder to visit your dentist regularly, which helps prevent other dental problems."