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LIFE & STYLE **ALT.HEALTH**

Fear of fluoride

Do we need it in our H2O?

By ELIZABETH BROMSTEIN

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Is our drinking water hurting us and making us stupid?

That's the accusation of anti-fluoride groups. In T.O., the mineral has been added to our water since 1963, currently at a concentration of 0.6 ppm – said to be below the level that would cause harm.

Since then, however, the number of sources of fluoride has increased, including toothpaste, mouth rinses and food, so the anti camp says we no longer need it in our water. But two years ago, health officials here voted to continue its addition.

The Canadian Dental Association stands by fluoridation as a cost-effective and wide-reaching means of preventing tooth decay, while Calgary, Waterloo and, most recently, Windsor have voted to stop the practice entirely. Should we be concerned?

What the experts say

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"Fluoridation is ineffective at reducing tooth decay, harmful to health and a waste of money. It hardens tooth enamel by topical application. Ingesting fluoride only leads to adverse side effects, such as dental fluorosis [discolouration of the teeth], and damage to bones and the thyroid. It could be harmful to kidney patients, babies and people who drink lots of water. Studies have linked fluoride to lower IQ and bone cancer. In 2006, the U.S. National

Research Council reviewed toxicology data and found that fluoride can be adversely affected. It also found studies linking fluoride to thyroid cancer and lower IQ plausible."

CAROL KOPF, *Fluoride Action Network, Levittown,*



"Fluoride has helped us, but we can work without it. Preventing tooth decay involves paying attention to the foods we eat as well as a healthy mouth – the pH balance. PH is controlled through diet, eating more fruits and vegetables. Old cheddar cheese and dark chocolate neutralize acid. Lemon juice is very acidic. Buy pH strips to test the pH of your saliva. People like water and lemon juice as a cleanse, but that creates wear on the enamel, as it chelates out the calcium. Brush your teeth before and not after, as it will brush the acid into the teeth."

DANA COLSON, *holistic dentist, Toronto*

"Ingesting fluoride is absolutely effective in preventing tooth decay. Fluoride works as a topical agent, strengthening the surface of the enamel. That happens every time you drink water. There is also a systemic effect. The only way fluoride is incorporated through the thickness of the enamel on a back molar is by having it systemically available in the blood while the tooth is developing inside the bone. Fluoride is a natural mineral found in dirt. It naturally appears in just about every water supply in the world at various levels. In areas where it's naturally higher, cavities are dramatically fewer. Because it's in water, it's in many foods and drinks. It's in the air we breathe. Fish and tea both have very high naturally occurring levels. Anything added to a water supply goes through rigorous toxicological review."

PAUL ANDREWS, *professor, pediatric dentistry, U of T*

"The primary benefit of fluoride is the topical effect, but it's believed there is also some systemic effect. In addition, fluoride is incorporated into saliva, so when you salivate, the teeth benefit. We support water fluoridation because it reaches the entire population and is relatively inexpensive."

EUAN SWAN, *manager, dental programs, Canadian Dental Association, Ottawa*

"When considering the risks and benefits of fluoride exposure, the level of intake needs to be considered. Our study summarized the findings of 27 studies, 25 carried out in China. On average, children with higher fluoride exposure showed poorer performance on IQ tests. Fluoride released into the groundwater in China in some cases greatly exceeded levels in the U.S. Complete information was not available on these studies, and some limitations were identified. These results do not allow us to make any judgment regarding possible levels of risk at levels of exposure typical in the U.S. On the other hand, neither can it be concluded that no risk is present."

ANNA CHOI, *research scientist*, and **PHILIPPE GRANDJEAN**, *professor, Harvard School of Public Health, Cambridge, Massachusetts*

Got a question?

Send your Alhealth queries to alhealth@nowtoronto.com



Is food the new crack?

Sure, the foodie fad is one delicious embrace of life's greatest pleasure. But while cuisine-ists are busy trolling for recipes, celebrating local ingredients, storming new restos and considering the artistic possibilities of the edible, are they endangering their health? NOW's special feature takes a look at the caloric and health implications of the fluoride takeover.

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A better you

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Blasting bullies

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