

Should we drink smoothies?

'Why not?' you may think. They taste great and are packed with fruit, so they must be good for you. But dentists don't agree

YES

'Smoothies have all the goodness of the whole fruit including fibre, which makes them a much better choice than fizzy drinks, plain fruit juice or cordials,' says Dr Joanne Lunn, a senior nutrition scientist

at the British Nutrition Foundation. 'A 250ml smoothie has around two servings of fruit, which can be a valuable and convenient contribution to the recommended 5-a-day.'

While smoothies are very popular with health-conscious adults on the go, they are also an excellent way to get children to eat more fruit, or to try out new fruits if they are fussy with their food.

Made from a mixture of puréed fruit and fruit juice or water, some smoothies also contain yogurt, so they contain a healthy dose of calcium too. And while sales of shop-bought smoothies are rocketing, it's easy to make your own at home.

All you need is some fresh or frozen fruit to whizz up in a blender and some freshly squeezed fruit juice, to thin it out into a drink. Add yogurt if you like, or even blend in plain, unsalted cashew nuts to give a creamy texture while adding extra protein, minerals and vitamins. Avocados are also great in smoothies – they are packed with nutrients and have a mild, nutty flavour. Excellent natural sweeteners are bananas and mangoes, while a few chunks of watermelon or cucumber will water down a thick juice.

Children who aren't tempted by smoothies might prefer them if you freeze the mixture into an ice lolly.

Compared with fruit juice that can contain very little fibre, smoothies can contain up to 6g of fibre in a 250ml serving because they contain the whole fruit, making up a sizeable chunk of the 18g of fibre a day we are recommended to have by the Department of Health. 'Check the label and choose one that contains a decent amount of fibre,' advises Dr Lunn. You could also try adding hemp seeds, wheat germ or chopped up dried prunes to boost the fibre and nutrient content of your homemade smoothies.

NO


'They may be good for getting your daily recommended servings of fruit, but if people rely on smoothies for their fruit intake and sip them between meals, it can seriously damage their teeth,' says Simon Howell, director of campaigns for the British Dental Health Foundation.

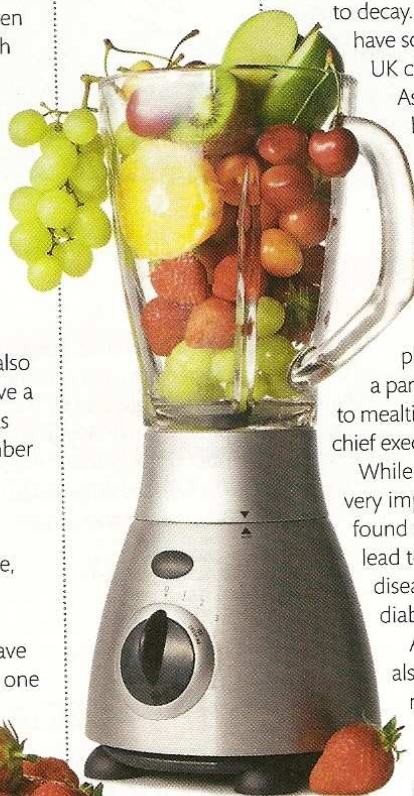
'Smoothies contain a lot of fructose, a natural fruit sugar, and they are acidic. This means that as well as the acid attacking tooth enamel, the sugar also causes plaque to build up, which can lead to decay. This is a particular problem for children, as they have softer teeth than adults.' Currently around half of UK children under five have decayed teeth.

As well as the natural sugar in smoothies, some brands contain added sugar, so unless you read the label, your health drink could end up being a high calorie, acid-producing cocktail.

Worryingly, a recent survey conducted by the British Dental Health Foundation and Oral B found that 30 per cent of people think smoothies are actually good for their teeth. 'The truth is that every time you have a smoothie, your teeth are placed under attack for at least an hour, making them a particularly bad snack drink. It's better to restrict them to mealtimes, especially in children,' says Dr Nigel Carter, chief executive of the British Dental Health Foundation.

While many people think that good dental health isn't very important overall, the latest scientific research has found that poor dental health and gum disease can lead to serious health conditions including heart disease, heart attacks, respiratory disease, strokes, diabetes and low-birth-weight babies.

As well as damaging your teeth, smoothies can also be bad for your waistline. A 250ml serving with no added sugar can contain around 200 calories, while a variety with added sugar can pack a whopping 300 calories. Plus some brands contain concentrated juice instead of fresh fruit, which means the juice has been heated to a very high temperature, so much of the goodness is lost. 



HEALTHY VERDICT

Smoothies can be a useful way to add fruit to your diet and can easily be topped up nutritionally by adding other ingredients such as nuts or seeds. However, don't rely on them solely for your fruit intake and keep teeth healthy by limiting them to mealtimes. Brush teeth twice a day but always wait for 30 minutes to an hour after a smoothie.