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TACKLE DENTAL HEALTH OF PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALLERS TO IMPROVE EVERYONE'S PERFORMANCE

Professional footballers have worryingly poor teeth that could be affecting their performance on the pitch, a study claims.

Nearly four out of 10 UK top-flight footballers have active tooth decay, while one in 20 has irreversible gum disease.

That's according to a study, published online in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine*.¹

And it's affecting performance and wellbeing, say the experts, led by Professor Ian Needleman, from the International Centre for Evidence-Based Oral Health at University College London.

The authors are now calling for regular dental screening to be a part of routine medical care in professional football, together with an increased emphasis on

simple effective preventive approaches to help athletes look after their teeth and gums.

But Melonie Prebble, secretary of the British Association of Dental Therapists, believes much more needs to be done to raise awareness among young men generally about the impact of poor dental health on not just sports performance, but overall health, too.

She said: "The dental profession is acutely aware that dental health affects quality of life and this study simply confirms and reinforces the message. The football industry must obviously now ensure players receive consistent dental screening, preventive advice and treatment to ensure their wellbeing. But there also

needs to be a clampdown on sports drinks and an emphasis on rehydration and remineralisation via other, more health-friendly drinks.

'Perhaps, if oral health education and prevention were introduced and promoted in high level sports, it might have a knock-on positive effect on a wider scale, aiding the education of the general public. Dental teams need to identify those patients who are at an increased risk of developing dental caries and provide tailored advice on how to better manage the risk.'

In a relevant study, published online at the *BDJ* in July 2015 – *Bodybuilding supplementation and tooth decay* – its authors noted that 'bodybuilding supplements are advertised to provide nutrients needed to help optimise muscle building, but they can contain high amounts of sugar. Supplement users are consuming these products, while not being aware of their high sugar content, putting them at a higher risk of developing dental caries'.

In Professor Needleman's survey, nearly four out of 10 (37%) of the players had active dental caries, and dental erosion was evident in over half (53%).

Nearly two thirds (64%) said they drank sports drinks at least three times a week, although the researchers point out that the association between sports drinks and dental erosion 'remains unclear'.

Eight out of 10 players also had gingivitis; in one in 20 (5%) this was moderate to severe – and irreversible. Half the mouth was affected by gum disease in three out of four players.

Around one in six (16%) reported current pain in their mouth or teeth, while around one in four (27%) experienced dental sensitivity to hot or cold food/drink.

Poor tooth and gum health 'bothered' almost half (45%) of them, and one in five (20%) said it undermined their quality of life. Around 7% said that it adversely affected their performance or training.

1. Needleman I, Ashley P, Meehan L, Petrie A, Weiler R, McNally S, Ayer C, Hanna R, Hunt I, Kell S, Ridgewell P and Taylor R. Poor oral health including active caries in 187 UK professional male football players: clinical dental examination performed by dentists. *Br J Sports Med* (2015); Published Online First: 2 November 2015.