Footballers' bad TEETH thought to be negatively affecting performances on the pitch

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A study found over three quarters of professional footballers suffer with gum disease, while 40% of players have dental cavities

Wondering why your favourite football team aren’t up to scratch? It may be because your heroes are not looking after their teeth.

University College London researchers found stars at top clubs including [Manchester United](http://www.irishmirror.ie/all-about/manchester-united-fc) are having their performance on the pitch affected by bad teeth.

Four out of 10 professional footballers have dental cavities, while a staggering 77% have gum disease.

Others are suffering with constant infections, and many regularly have toothache, according to the study published in the British Journal of Sports Medicine.

The shocking level of dental health is harming footballers’ performance and wellbeing, experts said.

The dental health of footballers also appears to be worse than for the general population, though it is not clear precisely why.

Many drink sports drinks several times a week, although evidence is “unclear” on whether this is to blame.

The study involved 187 footballers from eight clubs - Hull, Manchester United, Southampton, Swansea City, West Ham, Brighton and Hove Albion, Cardiff and Sheffield United.

Dentists checked the tooth and gum health of the players and each was quizzed about the impact of dental health on their personal and professional lives

Researchers found 37% of the footballers had at least one tooth affected by decay while 77% had needed fillings, with some needing more than five.

Overall, 84% of all footballers had at least one decayed or filled tooth.

Dental “erosion”, where the tooth is worn away by acid, was present in 53% of footballers. And 77% of footballers had half of their mouth affected by gingivitis (inflammation of the gums). In 5%, this was moderate to severe and irreversible.

Some 8% of footballers had at least one ulcer, abscess or open sore, while one in 10 had regular toothache and 16% experienced pain in their mouths. Over a quarter (27%) had sensitivity to hot or cold drinks.

More than 45% of footballers said they were “bothered” by their oral health, with 20% reporting an impact on their quality of life and 7% reporting an impact on training or performance.

The researchers said several things contributed to poor dental health, including food and drink and how much emphasis was placed on oral health in football.

Some teams had worse teeth than others, which suggests there is a role for preventing tooth decay and introducing formal screening in clubs, they said.

The study did not reveal which of the clubs’ players had the best and worst teeth.

They wrote: “Few teams integrate oral health promotion within overall medical care, and there is therefore lack of ongoing support and reinforcement of this health area for the athletes.

Oral health of professional footballers is poor, and this impacts on wellbeing and performance. Successful strategies to promote oral health within professional football are urgently needed. Furthermore, this study provides strong evidence to support oral health screening within professional football.”

The experts stressed the “relationship between sports drinks and dental erosion remains unclear”.

One review, which was just on children, found no link, although another study on 3,000 people found drinking sports drinks was linked to tooth decay.

On average, the footballers were aged 24, though they ranged in age from 18 to 39.