Coconut oil helps combat tooth decay, says study

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Coconut oil can act as a natural antibiotic and help fight the sugar-loving bacterium that causes tooth decay, according to a new study.

Scientists found that coconut oil fights tooth decay and could find its way into toothpaste and mouthwash as an active ingredient.

Research showed that coconut oil which had been treated with enzymes stopped the growth of *Streptococcus* bacteria – a major sugar-loving bacterium that causes tooth decay. Tooth decay affects 60 to 90 per cent of children in industralised countries, the report said.

"Dental caries is a commonly overlooked health problem affecting 60 to 90 per cent of children and the majority of adults in industrialised countries," lead researcher Dr Damien Brady, of the Athlone Institute of Technology in Ireland, said.

"Incorporating enzyme-modified coconut oil into dental hygiene products would be an attractive alternative to chemical additives, particularly as it works at relatively low concentrations," he said.

Brady added that his findings could prove to be important considering the problem of bugs increasing resistance to many existing antibiotic treatments.

Brady's experiments were inspired by previous research showing that partially digested milk made *S. mutans* less likely to stick to tooth enamel.

The oils were then tested against *Streptococcus* bacteria which are common inhabitants of the mouth.

Only the enzyme-modified coconut oil showed an ability to inhibit the growth of most strains of the bacteria.

It also attacked *Streptococcus mutans*, an acid-producing bacterium which is a major cause of tooth decay.

"Our data suggests that products of human digestion show antimicrobial activity. This could have implications for how bacteria colonise the cells lining the digestive tract and for overall gut health," Brady said.

He now plans to check if the enzyme-treated coconut oil has any other killer qualities.

Their studies are also looking into the workings of antibacterial activity in the human gut

The study was presented at the Society for General Microbiology's autumn conference.