

The Oral Health Connection

Eating Disorders & Oral Health



Teeth have become shortened and pulp is exposed due to erosive effects of acid.

Did you know?

According to the National Eating Disorders Association, studies find up to 89 percent of bulimic patients have signs of tooth erosion, due to the effects of powerful stomach acid.

Bulimia Nervosa is an eating disorder that harms your overall health and is particularly destructive to teeth. It involves secret repeated binge eating followed by purging—self-induced vomiting, use of laxatives, fasting, diuretics or diet pills. The digestive system contains strong acids that break down food. When vomiting is used to purge food from the body, these acids attack tooth enamel. **Repeated vomiting can severely erode tooth enamel and over time, teeth will become worn and translucent.** Your mouth, throat and salivary glands may become swollen and tender and bad breath may result.

Anorexia Nervosa is another eating disorder that is characterized by an intense fear of weight gain, the desire to be thinner, and an inability to maintain a minimally normal weight for height and age. It's self-induced starvation.

Each of these disorders robs the body of adequate vitamins, minerals, proteins and other nutrients needed for good health causing potential injury to teeth, muscles and major organs.

Thinning of enamel



The frequent vomiting and nutritional deficiencies often associated with eating disorders severely affect oral health. Above teeth have become translucent as acid destroys inner portion, leaving a layer of thin enamel.

Signs and Symptoms

- Loss of tissue and erosive lesions on the surface of teeth due to the effects of acid. **These lesions can appear as early as 6 months from the start of the problem.**
- Changes in the color, shape, and length of teeth. Teeth can become translucent and weak.
- Increased sensitivity to temperature. In extreme cases the pulp can be exposed and cause infection, discoloration, or even pulp death.
- Enlargement of the salivary glands, dry mouth, and reddened, dry, cracked lips.

Teeth erosion due to purging



Over time, this loss of tooth enamel can be considerable, and the teeth change in color, shape and length. They can also become brittle, translucent and sensitive to temperature. The salivary glands may swell, causing the jaw to widen and assume a squared appearance. Lips may become reddened, dry and cracked, and the patient may also experience chronic dry mouth.

If you or someone you love is struggling with an eating disorder please seek the help of a physician or mental health provider. Damage to the teeth and enamel due to eating disorders can be treated- see your dental professional for treatment options.