

Leicestershire Adult Eating Disorders Service

DENTAL INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS WITH EATING DISORDERS

This leaflet provides information for patients about some of the dental problems caused by eating disorders. The aim of this is to provide you with information which is important to you, not to worry or upset you. The information may raise questions to discuss with your doctor, therapist or dentist.

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Eating disorders can cause damage to teeth in two main ways

1. Vomiting can cause problems:

Vomiting brings stomach acid into your mouth. Frequent vomiting can erode the enamel surface of the teeth away. Your teeth can start to be worn down, and this may leave your fillings standing proud.

This can leave the next layers exposed and this causes pain and sensitivity. You may particularly notice this when eating hot / cold or sweet foods and drinks.

The teeth can start to change in appearance, becoming more yellow, smoother, and glassy.

Damaged enamel makes it easier for bacteria to enter the teeth and cause tooth decay.

If there is frequent bingeing on sugary foods and drinks, the risk of decay is further increased.

Repeated vomiting can leave you with a dry mouth, and this is problematic because the normal levels of saliva are no longer there to combat tooth decay.

Vomiting can also cause the salivary glands to swell up, giving the jawline a rounded appearance, which can be upsetting if it is mistaken for weight gain.

2. Being at low body weight can also impact on teeth:

This is because the general lack of nutrients can cause bones to thin (osteoporosis), so that your jaw bones no longer hold your teeth in place so well, and they can fall out.

What you can do to help protect your teeth

Of course, the best solution is to stop bingeing and vomiting and get back to a normal weight if you are underweight. However, this can be a long process, and meantime, there are things that can help to protect your teeth.

Brushing your teeth twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste will help. Look for toothpastes with at least 1500 ppm of fluoride. Use a small-headed medium bristled brush. Also try to floss or use an interdental brush to reach between your teeth where normal brushing alone can't reach.

If you vomit, then don't brush your teeth for at least an hour. This is because the acid will have weakened the enamel, and brushing might rub it away further. Instead, rinse your mouth out with a fluoride mouthwash, or with sodium bicarbonate mixed with water. If this is not available, at least rinse with water.

After bingeing on sugary foods, rinse your mouth out with a fluoride toothpaste or with water. Some dentists suggest using a straw for drinking sugary / fizzy drinks.

If your teeth are sensitive use a toothpaste specifically for sensitive teeth.

It is best to see the dentist regularly, every six months. Some patients avoid going to the dentist for fear of what they may find is going wrong with their teeth. Some people may be embarrassed about the eating disorder, and not want the dentist to spot it, or to ask about it. However, most dentists are trained about the eating disorders, and will not be surprised if you tell them about your difficulties. If you have a difficult experience, don't be put off; try another dentist. Hopefully you will find someone you feel comfortable with, and can then get the appropriate and most timely care for your teeth.

If you have any questions or concerns about the information in this leaflet you can raise these with your doctor or therapist or leave a message with our secretaries on 0116 225 2557.