

Eating Disorders & Oral Health

A Fact Sheet



About 1% of female adolescents have anorexia and 4% of college-aged women have bulimia according to Anorexia Nervosa and Related Eating Disorders Inc.

- The oral effects of an eating disorder are hard to hide from a dental professional.
- Telltale signs appear early in the mouth and despite the secretive nature of the disease a dental professional may be the first to know and encourage a patient to get help.
- The most common eating disorders that cause problems in the mouth are bulimia nervosa and anorexia nervosa. Although there are other types of eating disorders these tend to cause the most damage to the teeth and mouth.

Bulimia & Oral Health

Bulimia is an eating disorder that involves eating more food at one time that you think you should, called binge eating, and then trying to get rid of that food by purging— self induced vomiting, use of laxatives, fasting, diuretics, diet pills or over exercising. Bulimia is dangerous to your overall health and especially harmful to your teeth:

- When repeated vomiting is used to purge food from the body, the strong acids in the digestive system erode tooth enamel and weaken fillings and teeth become worn and translucent.
- Your mouth, throat and salivary glands become swollen and tender.
- Repeatedly vomiting can cause sores in the corners of the mouth and bad breath.

Anorexia & Oral Health

Anorexia is a psychological disorder that involves a distortion of body image, an intense fear of weight gain and the desire to be thinner. Anorexia often involves self-induced starvation, purging and over exercising the same as Bulimia.

Anorexia Nervosa may produce some of the same oral symptoms as bulimia.

In order to neutralize the effects of stomach acid on your teeth you should:

- Immediately after purging, do not brush, but rinse the mouth with baking soda mixed in water, or sugar-free, alcohol-free mouth rinse, or with plain water if nothing else is available.
- Brush and floss daily

The Dental Professional:

- May encourage you to seek professional help for the eating disorder.
- May create a mouth guard that covers the teeth to help protect them from further erosion by stomach acid.
- Restore damaged teeth, but not until after you get treatment for the eating disorder.
- Provide you with fluoride treatments to help protect your teeth.

