

Taking a bite out of tooth wear

Professor Andrew Eder explores the multifactorial challenges of an increasingly common oral health issue – that of tooth wear

Thanks to medical advances people are living for longer, and while time and education has allowed us to have better control over tooth decay and gum disease than ever before, tooth wear is an increasingly common dental problem.

More than 75% of adults and over half of children show signs of tooth wear. The growth of moderate wear in young adults over the last few years, as highlighted by the most recent Adult Dental Health Survey (ADHS), is of clinical relevance because it is indicative of destruction beyond that which we would expect for the patient's age.

A multifactorial challenge

There are three main types of tooth wear - erosion, abrasion and attrition. Patients suffering tooth wear may exhibit one, two or all three forms.

Erosion is tooth wear resulting, for example, from the consumption of acidic food and drinks (including, but not limited to, the usual suspects such as fruit juices, alcohol, fizzy drinks, sports beverages, etc.) or stomach acid regurgitation, which is often associated with conditions such as bulimia, pregnancy sickness or hiatus hernia.

Then there's abrasion, which is tooth wear caused by excessive rubbing away of enamel and dentine as a result of, perhaps, vigorous tooth brushing, ceramic restorations rubbing against the natural dentition or the consumption of foods with a rough texture.

With attrition, there is contact between the teeth over and above what we would consider 'normal' use. Such patients generally suffer from parafunctional activity or bruxism – grinding and clenching their teeth at night – which is often linked to a stressful lifestyle.

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Missing teeth, erosion, abrasion and attrition

Diagnosing tooth wear

Tooth wear is a natural part of life and progresses as we age, so some tooth wear is chronological and unavoidable. However, some patients show signs of pathological wear due to a rather more aggressive insult and early intervention by dental professionals can make a real difference in helping patients to avoid the need for extensive restorative dentistry further down the line.

The first step in the clinician's fight against tooth wear is to assess each patient's risk. For dentists, the signs that indicate tooth wear is occurring and action is needed include:

- Sensitive teeth
- Discolouration, including yellowing and loss of shine (where some of the outer enamel layer has been lost)
- Sharp or chipped anterior teeth
- Occlusal surfaces wearing flat and taking on a shiny, pitted appearance
- Altered occlusion as vertical height changes
- Restorations standing proud of the teeth
- Abfraction lesions developing cervically
- V-shaped notches or shallower cupping present cervically.

Raising awareness

The challenge facing the dental team is to raise patients' awareness of the problems associated with tooth wear. Those now in

their 70s and older tend to be burdened with heavily restored dentitions due to a history of tooth decay. Without early intervention, following generations could be similarly burdened, but this time as a result of tooth wear. Timely diagnosis and preventive action are needed if the dental profession is to help patients preserve their natural teeth and maintain optimal levels of oral health. [PD](#)

The London Tooth Wear Centre is delighted to open its doors to dental colleagues for a referral evening on Tuesday 16 June 2015. The event is free to attend and worth one hour of verifiable CPD. Space is limited to only a few visitors to ensure everyone receives the attention they deserve. For further details on the referral evenings and to book your place, please email info@toothwear.co.uk or call 020 7486 7180



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