

A smile that wears well

Professor Andrew Eder offers advice for dealing with some of the more common tooth wear-associated problems patients present with, to help prevent further deterioration and, perhaps, reverse some of the damage

Prevention is better than cure. How many times have we dental professionals read that now? But there's no other way of putting it, and it's top of most dentists' agenda. The same adage reflects the needs of patients suffering with tooth wear beyond that which we would consider normal for their age.

With this in mind, this article will focus on some of the more prevalent lifestyle choices and conditions that are contributing to our society's troubling level of tooth surface loss, which at last count was affecting the anterior teeth of over three quarters of dentate adults in the UK.

Carbonated drinks

Although most people are aware of the risk to their teeth that frequently consuming sugar presents, far fewer realise the detrimental effects of a carbonated liquid. Carbonic, citric and phosphoric acids, which are to be found in carbonated drinks, all have a low pH and therefore the potential to cause dental erosion.

Preventive advice includes suggesting alternative drinks that are less acidic, such as the drink du jour – coconut water. If the patient can't see their way to eliminating carbonated soft drinks from their diet, limiting them to meal times is beneficial.

The patient may suffer with hypersensitivity due to the wear. In such cases, using a fluoridated mouthrinse every day at a different time to toothbrushing is an effective first line of defence. A desensitising

toothpaste and/or prescription fluoride toothpaste can be helpful in alleviating sensitivity, while use of a calcium phosphate paste, applied in carriers, is an additional option if the symptoms are severe. Also, placing protective covering restorations can eliminate sensitivity and minimise further wear.

Alcohol abuse

Alcohol is acidic and therefore highly erosive, especially when consumed frequently, in large quantities over an extended period of time. It may also be that the high alcohol intake occasionally causes vomiting, which will exacerbate damage to the dentition.

It is important that any patients showing signs of excessive alcohol consumption are made aware that their lifestyle choices may be the cause of tooth damage. It is also essential to recognise that the patient may find it very difficult or not want to make changes to what may be an integral part of their social life.

Advice needs to be realistic and, unless the patient is fully committed to immediate change, should encourage a gradual lessening. Effective prevention against further progression involves recognition, education, and monitoring home care.

Eating disorders

Sadly, eating disorders are by products of the body-conscious society in which we live. Bulimia nervosa is more common than anorexia nervosa; however, both often start in early adolescence and are rising in prevalence.

The extended periods of intentional vomiting instigated by bulimics have considerable impact on a patient's dentition and can result in substantial oral health problems.

Advice rather than treatment features heavily during the initial stage of helping a

patient suffering with bulimia. Diet analysis and general guidance on how to reduce the effect of acidic foodstuffs should also be given.

Extra protection can be provided via calcium and phosphate ions, such as those found in GC Tooth Mousse, helping to restore the mineral balance, neutralise acidic challenges and stimulate salivary flow.

Crisis management

With people living longer, we need to work with our younger patients now to ensure their oral health does not let them down and, without doubt, one area that urgently needs our attention is that of tooth wear.

Poor drink choices and eating disorders like bulimia, as well as other factors, contribute to tooth wear, so it is important to keep an eye out for the tell-tale signs and act without delay if we are to avoid the otherwise seemingly inevitable oral health crisis that tooth wear is set to create in the not too distant future. ^{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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