



A Healthy Smile

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Eating Disorders and Your Teeth

It is said that the eyes are the gateway to your soul, but the eyes only tell half the story. Before you even say a word, your heart is communicating through your smile. A beautiful smile radiates confidence, sincerity, warmth, and affects the way you interact with the world.

My name is Dr. Edward Lowe and I have been in private practice dentistry for over 20 years in downtown Vancouver. I love what I do and am passionate about the care and well being of my patients. My practice focuses on comprehensive aesthetic and cosmetic rehabilitation of compromised dentition using the latest materials and techniques.

It is especially rewarding when I am presented with the opportunity to transform an individual's life and resurrect both their smile and self-esteem.



Dr. Edward Lowe

Protecting that Valuable Enamel

Anorexia, Bulimia, Binge Eating and Compulsive Overeating exact their toll both physically and emotionally on those suffering with any of these eating disorders. It is the bingeing and purging activity that does most of the damage to the teeth of the patient. Purging strips the teeth of the protective enamel layer covering each tooth. Once the protective enamel is gone there is no replacing it except with comprehensive dental care. The teeth weaken and become susceptible to decay, fracturing, and worst of all - falling out.

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Treating the Disorder

While dentists do not treat eating disorders, they do treat the physical damage to oral structures that results. Many people suffering from bulimia are able to hide the disorder from others but it is more difficult to keep it a secret from their dentist. Changes inside the mouth of a bulimic can be detected during the course of a routine dental examination.

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The **oral manifestations** of bulimia are:

1. **Smooth outer surface (enamel) erosion, which is a major sign of bulimic behavior.** This is the most common effect of vomiting. This loss of enamel and dentin usually occurs on the upper lingual surfaces of their teeth. These teeth will have a smooth glassy appearance that is void of stains or lines. If the back teeth are affected there is often a loss of the biting surfaces of these teeth and they become highly susceptible to decay and more serious infections of the nerves within these teeth. These signs often appear after the bulimic has been bingeing and purging for at least two years. There is a relationship between tooth erosion and frequency and degree of vomiting as well as oral hygiene habits. If they have excellent hygiene practices these symptoms may not be present. These symptoms could progress to the point of causing:
 - The nerve of the tooth to be exposed leading to temperature sensitivity
 - Margins of fillings on the back teeth may appear higher than the tooth structure around the filling
 - Their bite can change causing an open bite due to loss of tooth structure.
2. **Parotid gland swelling.** Swelling is common in bulimics. The occurrence of enlargement is related to the duration and severity of vomiting.
3. **Dry Mouth.** The amount of saliva is affected by abuse of laxatives, diuretics, dehydration from fasting and vomiting.
4. **Gum tissue trauma.** This condition is due to ingesting large amounts of food and by the force of vomiting. If objects are used to induce vomiting they can injury the soft palate. Dehydration will affect gum tissue.



Suggestions for Detection

1. Include a general screening with questions regarding eating and maintaining weight.
2. Bring the symptoms you observe to their attention. "You have loss of enamel. This is often seen in individuals who vomit. Have you ever vomited or purged in this way?"
3. Be gentle and understanding about the problem while trying to encourage the bulimic at their appointments.
4. Refer them to a mental health professional who is experienced in eating disorders.
5. Look for irritated areas or callus on the top surface of right or left forefinger, caused by rubbing the finger on the incisal edges of the upper anterior teeth while inducing vomiting.



Dental Treatments Protocol

- Start with rigorous hygiene and home care.
- Regular professional dental cleanings
- In-office fluoride applications to prevent further erosion and decrease dentin sensitivity.
- Daily home application of fluoride in custom trays to promote remineralization of the enamel.
- Use of artificial saliva.
- Rinsing their mouth with water immediately after vomiting to decrease the acidity in the mouth.
- Use a fluoride rinse to neutralize acids and protect and remineralize the tooth surfaces.
- **Do NOT brush teeth after vomiting, it will lead to excessive enamel erosion.**
- Commitment to professional treatment.
- Use desensitizing toothpaste to decrease dentinal sensitivity.
- Esthetic treatment should not be done during the active phase of this disorder. Restoring esthetics can be done in the recovery stage.
- When treating during RECOVERY their teeth may need to be restored to normal appearance.
- Recommend 1,200-1,500 mg of calcium per day, in addition to eating a healthy variety of all foods.
- Frequent dental visits to monitor condition of the mouth.



Resurrection of the Dentition

Restoration of damaged surfaces can be accomplished with porcelain-laminated veneers, dentin-bonded crowns with minimal tooth preparation, composites, and complete-coverage restorations. Depending on the amount of damage incurred, resurrection of the dentition can range from:

- A few restorations to repair decay and minor erosion
- A functional and esthetic smile design to restore the smile in the anterior of the mouth
- A full mouth esthetic oral rehabilitation to restore the original vertical dimension of the posterior teeth as well as the smile.



Confidence and Self Esteem

Bulimia patients with dental problems often need care. It is upsetting to see a patient, in many cases a young person, with the dentition of a senior who has enjoyed a lifetime of wear with their teeth. It fills me with a determination to step in and do something. If the patient is on the road to recovery and permits me to get involved, then my team and I visit the various options to restore the smile to full function and beauty. In my experience, the effect on their confidence and self-esteem speaks volumes and I believe is a tremendous contribution to their physical and emotional healing.

Pictured are examples of what can be accomplished with esthetic dentistry.

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