

## Bulimia and Your Teeth

Given time, eating disorders like bulimia may lead to serious dental problems. Repeated vomiting can result in loss of tooth enamel, tooth decay, and gum disease. After frequent exposure to gastric acid, teeth become rounded and soft as enamel is eaten away, and fillings may stick out above the gum line. Loss of enamel and unconscious grinding of the teeth, usually during sleep, are the two most common causes of tooth loss.

The recurring vomiting of bulimia produces a distinctive erosion pattern that acts like a signature in a person's mouth. There is no other erosion pattern quite like it. Dentists can tell if the bulimia is a relatively new or chronic condition by the amount of damage done. There is no way to stop the hydrochloric acid from the stomach stripping the teeth of protective enamel and exposing the dentin underneath. The result is a long list of symptoms and conditions that can include:

- Cavities
- Enamel Erosion
- Gum soreness, pain, and inflammation
- Dry mouth
- Chronic sore throat
- Inflammation of the esophagus
- Hemorrhaging palates (caused by tiny blood vessels on the roof of the mouth bursting open during purging)
- Dramatically reduced saliva production
- Difficulty in swallowing
- Dislocations of the lower jaw and temporomandibular joint (where the lower jaw hinges with the rest or the skull)

To reduce the chances of enamel erosion and gum disease for those who have not yet been able to completely stop vomiting make sure to brush daily with fluoridated toothpaste after each meal, followed by flossing.

Some dentists recommend using a fluoride mouthwash or fluoride applications to help repair tooth damage. If tooth enamel has already eroded, another option is to have your teeth restored with resins or crowns because the inner portion of the tooth, also called the dentin, is especially vulnerable to acid erosion. Finally, if you are uncomfortable talking to the dentist about your concerns, it may be easier to speak privately with the dental hygienist first.



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