

Anorexia

Anorexia is an eating disorder in which a person does not maintain a minimum body weight which is considered healthy for the person's age and height. Anorexia nervosa is an eating disorder in which one obsesses about their weight and the food they eat. People with anorexia nervosa may have an intense fear of weight gain, have a desire to be thinner and attempt to maintain a weight that's far below normal for their age and height. In order to prevent weight gain or to continue losing weight, people with anorexia nervosa may use extreme measures such as starving themselves, exercising or excessively. Bulimia Nervosa is an eating disorder that is also dangerous to your overall health and is particularly destructive to teeth. People with bulimia nervosa engage in secret repeated binge eating followed by purging or self-induced vomiting, or the use of laxatives, fasting, diuretics or diet pills or a combination of these methods. Each of these eating disorders robs the body of adequate minerals, vitamins, proteins and other nutrients needed for good health causing potential injury to teeth, muscles and major organs.

The frequent vomiting and nutritional deficiencies which are often associated with anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa can severely affect the health of our teeth and oral environment. According to the National Eating Disorders Association, studies find up to 89 percent of bulimic patients have signs of tooth erosion, due to the effects of powerful stomach acid. The digestive system contains strong acids which are used to break down food. When vomiting is used to purge food from the body, the acids expelled from the stomach attack tooth enamel. Repeated vomiting can severely erode tooth enamel. Over time the loss of tooth enamel can be considerable, and the teeth change in color becoming more yellow, worn thin and can become shorter. This can lead to teeth becoming brittle and sensitive to temperature. The mouth, throat and salivary glands can become swollen and tender and bad breath can result. Lips may become reddened, dry and cracked, and chronic dry mouth can also be experienced. Soft tissue lesions such as angular cheilitis, candida, and oral mucosal ulceration may also occur as a result of nutritional deficiencies.

Dental treatment of patients with anorexia varies with the severity and duration of the disease and also the methods used to prevent weight gain. It is imperative that the underlying anorexia be treated prior to performing extensive dental treatment. It is recommended that patients with bulimia do not brush their teeth after vomiting as the acid has made the teeth soft and immediate brushing can remove more tooth structure; instead, they should rinse their mouth with water to dilute and remove the acid. After patients have begun therapy for anorexia, dental treatment can begin to restore the damage. When the erosion on the lingual or tongue side of the teeth is minor composite or white fillings can be placed to replace lost enamel. When the erosion is extensive crowns are often required to replace missing tooth structure and restore the bite.

The biggest challenge in treating anorexia nervosa is having the person become aware that they have a disease which needs treatment. Most people with anorexia deny that they have an eating disorder and their desire to remain thin overrides concerns about their health. They often do not seek treatment until their condition is fairly advanced. If you're experiencing any of these problems, or if you think you may have an eating disorder, get help. If you're hiding your anorexia from loved ones, try to find a confidant you can talk to about what's going on. Unfortunately, many people with anorexia don't want treatment, at least initially. If you have a loved one you're worried about, urge her or him to talk to a physician.

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