

Key to wearing well whatever your age

BY PROFESSOR ANDREW EDER

TOOTH WEAR is no respecter of age; in fact, it is increasing across the UK among both the young and the old.

But why does it matter? After all, it is a natural part of ageing. True — but lifestyle can accelerate and exacerbate this process. The result may be tooth sensitivity and an unsightly smile due to teeth becoming short and unattractive, while rough tooth edges can harm the lips, tongue and inside of the cheeks.

More than three-quarters of adults and more than half of children show signs of tooth wear. What is more, sadly, 35 per cent of 12-year-olds and 28 per cent of 15-year-olds are too embarrassed to smile or laugh due to the condition of their teeth.

Without doubt, tooth wear has the potential to affect a person's self-esteem for life. And that is not something any of us want for ourselves or for our children.

What can be done to minimise and prevent tooth wear that might otherwise require expensive and extensive dental treatment further down the line?

Particularly common among children and young adults, tooth erosion is caused by consuming acidic foods and drinks; the acid attacks the outer surface of the teeth.

Culprits include fruit juices, smoothies, sports beverages and fizzy drinks (including sugar-free).

Where possible, drink still water or low-fat milk between meals, limit fruit juice to once per day and avoid fizzy drinks.

Another significant cause of tooth erosion is bulimia nervosa, which involves eating large quantities of food and then deliberately vomiting, bringing up stomach acid that can damage the teeth.

Young women, particularly those aged 12 to 20, are the most likely to develop an eating disorder but older women and men of all ages can also have an eating disorder.

Where acid is damaging teeth, you can use these preventative measures following consumption of something acidic or an episode of vomiting:

- Rinse the mouth with water for 15 to 30 seconds.

- Chew sugar-free gum or eat a piece of cheese.

- Wait at least an hour to brush teeth.

- Use a toothpaste that contains at least 1,400ppm fluoride and a non-abrasive toothbrush.

- Use a fluoridated mouthwash every day at a different time from tooth brushing, as well as before or after an acidic event.

In addition, if wear is linked to tooth grinding brought on by stress, it may help to do something relaxing before bed, such as yoga, reading or having a bath. In addition, if you are worried that you may be brushing your teeth too hard — which can also lead to tooth wear — ask your dentist or hygienist to demonstrate how to brush your teeth without being too vigorous and perhaps use a softer toothbrush and a minimally abrasive toothpaste.

If you have any concerns about your oral health, or that of your children, call your dental practice without delay. Do not suffer in silence; dentists and hygienists are here to help.

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