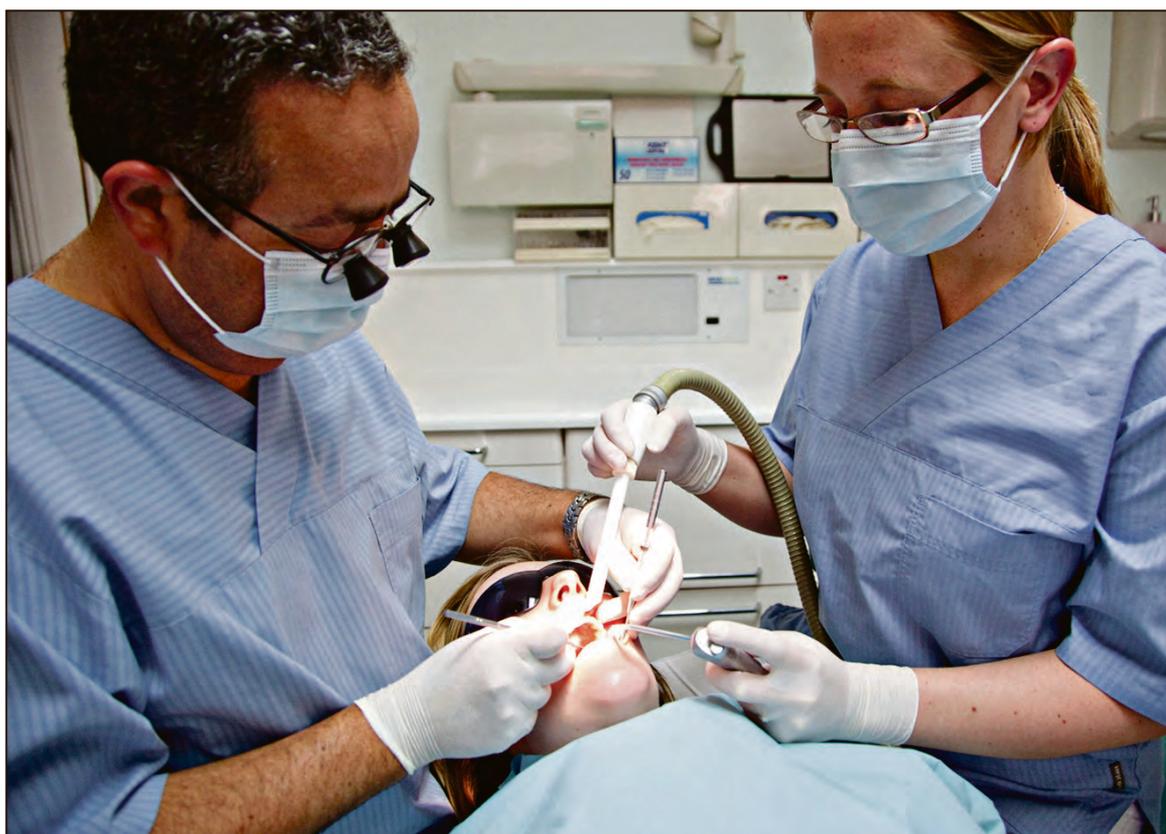


We're smiling now, but will our teeth stay strong? Billie Josephs reports



Professor Eder sheds light on tooth wear caused by grinding, brushing, diet or other issues

Brush up on tactics for tooth protection

THERE WAS a time when British teeth were the target of bad jokes, especially among Americans who for generations have lived at the epicentre of dental beauty and hygiene, thanks to a legion of doting parents and celebrity dentists.

An "American smile" has always been as much a matter of pride across the Atlantic – as are the Stars and Stripes and US kids seem to spend their school days with their teeth encased in metal in order to ensure that they achieve that Hollywood teeth grin in time for college.

Brits, on the other hand, are said to have erred to the other extreme with a tradition of fearing the dentist, refusing to accept even the fluoridation of the water supply and, as for cosmetic dentistry, dismissing it as a luxury fit only for the very rich.

Today, however, things have changed dramatically, with most Britons becoming as teeth-conscious as their American counterparts. It is now the thing to visit the dentist and hygienist at least twice a year and brushing and flossing regularly is considered essential. No one even bats an eyelid as toothpaste on sale in the high street boasts that it contains fluoride. People use mouthwashes daily and most are even willing to pay out for orthodontic treatment to straighten their or their children's teeth.

Changes in diet have played a role in improving dental and general health as has the massive drop in smoking. Many people now regard teeth whitening as normal and fillings are available

in white rather than the "traditional" grey amalgam types.

But there is a lesser known problem which is increasingly afflicting the nation's teeth and which is different from decay or gum disease. It can leave teeth literally worn out and, if ignored for long enough, this relatively painless affliction can make your teeth shrink.

Rescuing worn out teeth has become a matter of deep concern to one of Britain's top dentists Professor Andrew Eder, the director of Wimpole Street's London Tooth Wear Centre.

He points to three main causes – attrition (tooth grinding and clenching, which usually occurs at night); abrasion (excessive rubbing of enamel and dentine during tooth brushing or eating a coarse diet) and acid erosion (caused by the consumption of acidic foods and drinks or having digestive acid problems).

Professor Eder points out that early diagnosis is most important and results in simpler treatment, such as monitoring and prevention, but much depends on the cause of the problem.

A fitted mouthguard can protect against damage from tooth grinding, poor brushing techniques can be corrected and a change of diet can end acid erosion. On occasion however, he says, more complex treatments may be needed "to restore function and a pleasing appearance".

As the population is ageing, sometimes the struggle to save teeth is lost and that is when companies like the Golders Green-based Dentures Direct come in.

Its dentures, generally made from acrylic resins but with a wide variety of other materials also available, are made in-house.

For those who have lost all their teeth, a complete set of upper and lower dentures can be produced to replace them. However, if only a few teeth need replacing, a cosmetic dentist may be able to fit a partial denture or an overdenture which can prevent existing, healthy teeth from moving into gaps following tooth loss.

Dentures sometimes need to be replaced as you age and your gums shrink, but Dentures Direct says that, while a new set of dentures may be needed, it might also be possible to make simple modifications to rectify the problem.

To protect against wear and tear, it advises "you should always make sure you take care of your dentures and clean them frequently."

For the younger generation, prevention is the way forward. At Hadley Green Dental Practice, preventive treatments for children include advice on diet and hygiene, fissure sealants and fluoride varnish to protect enamel from decay.

Children's check-ups are free for under 14s, if their parents are patients at the practice.

Adults and children have access to a full range of affordable private dentistry, including hygiene treatments, white fillings, crowns, veneers, tooth whitening, endodontic treatment, dentures and extractions.

Dr Kent's gentle approach is reassuring to nervous patients and young children, so they will not mind coming back for regular check-ups, to protect that smile for life.

ARE YOU WORRIED ABOUT YOUR FRONT TEETH?

Have they become more sensitive?
Are they sharp or chipping at the edges?
Have you stopped smiling?

This could be related to acidic foods and drinks in your diet, stomach acid reflux or even grinding and clenching which often takes place at night.

Most often, it is a combination of problems and, as we all keep our teeth longer, such problems of tooth wear are on the increase.

THERE ARE MANY WAYS WE CAN HELP YOU TO PROTECT YOUR TEETH.

PLEASE DO CONTACT US FOR FURTHER INFORMATION.

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