

Billie Josephs enjoys a more laid-back time in the dentist's chair

Time to brush up on our tooth technique

HAVE a fearful childhood experience of a dour Scots dentist, who after drilling my tooth to within an inch of its life, looked down at me and, in a sombre tone, asked: "Tell me. Do ye read yer Bible?" Many can trace their fears back to similar trauma. But today, visiting the dentist is a much happier, less-painful event.

We're all more aware of dental hygiene these days, brushing regularly and benefiting from fluoride in toothpaste and drinking water. These measures have put decay in retreat and ensured that teeth survive as we live to a ripe old age. But as a result, wear and tear of teeth is an increasingly significant problem.

Nearly all adults and more than 50 per cent of children have signs of tooth wear, says London dentist Professor Andrew Eder, director of the specialist London Tooth Wear Centre in Wimpole Street. Longevity is not the only cause. Teeth are also damaged by subconscious grinding, the consumption

of abrasive foods in a "healthy" diet, over-vigorous brushing and erosion by acidic foods and drinks and stomach acid regurgitation.

Possible signs of tooth wear are sharp and sensitive teeth that look shorter, as well as problems chewing or speaking. "Identification of the cause of tooth wear at the outset is essential, otherwise the more comprehensive treatment is likely to fail," says Professor Eder. "Patients who present with regular acid regurgitation should be referred for medical investigation, while those drinking lots of fruit juice and sparkling drinks may simply be advised to modify their intake. Online bleaching remedies to 'whiten' teeth can also be a cause of enamel loss, due to their abrasive and acidic content."

Whatever your teeth are like, do not be deterred from visiting the dentist by nervousness, as the longer you stay away, the more work your teeth will need. Seek help from a therapist, says Finchley dentist Dr Douglas Miller. His

practice manager Sharon Floyd is a qualified therapist who will help you talk through your fears.

You could also opt for cognitive behavioural therapy, acupuncture or sedation – this is not a general anaesthetic, says Dr Miller, but provides "great benefits" in relaxing you during treatment. He is also happy for patients to bring a favourite CD of soothing music, to play during treatment.

And the dreaded injections can be a thing of the past. Dr Miller uses a gel that numbs the gum before treatment starts.

He has also introduced minimally invasive techniques that avoid the need for drilling and for root canal treatment. A new product seals off decay under the enamel of a tooth – in 90 per cent of cases this arrests the decay in its tracks, eliminating the need for drilling. Another material, Biodentine, can remove the need for root canal treatment. If Dr Miller finds deep tooth decay close to the nerve, he applies the dentine-like substance and in many cases the nerve survives.

A so-called "healthy" diet may be ruinous for enamel



Professor Andrew Eder: identifying the cause of dental wear is vital



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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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