Eating Disorders Affect Oral Health

Eating disorders can damage your oral health and physical health. More than 10 million Americans currently suffer from these disorders which include:

Anorexia: Limiting eating to the point of starvation

Bulimia: Excessive eating followed by purging

Binge eating: Excessive eating without purging

Dentists and dental hygienists are often on the front line of spotting these disorders because changes in the mouth are often the first physical signs of an eating disorder. Signs of an eating disorder may include:[1]

Gum disease—gums bleed easily due to malnutrition.

Increased cavities—people use candy and sweetened drinks for energy and to stop feeling hungry.

Brittle or weak teeth—obvious changes occur in the color, shape and length of teeth.

Loss of dental enamel from self-induced vomiting—stomach acid eats away at tooth surfaces.

Because these conditions can be painful, people often visit dental offices for relief. That's why a dentist may be the first health professional to see what is happening.

Did you know?

Up to 89 percent of bulimic patients have signs of acid-damaged teeth.

Quick bites

Changes in the mouth are often the first physical signs of an eating disorder. Some symptoms include:[2]

- Fruity or an unusual smell to breath
- Chronic dry mouth
- Cracked, red and dry lips
- Enlarged salivary glands
- Mouth sores
- Highly sensitive teeth

Getting professional help for an eating disorder is very important. The earlier treatment begins, the better chance there is for recovery.

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Visit us online for more information on oral and overall health!

General source: National Eating Disorders Association, web. **1.** University of Washington and Washington State Oral Health Program, "Adults with Eating Disorders—Oral Health Fact Sheet for Dental Professionals," web. **2.** Academy of General Dentistry, "How Your Dentist Can Detect an Eating Disorder," web.

Healthy Smile, Happy Life

Delta Dental of Arkansas, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, and Tennessee

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