

What is tooth wear?

Tooth wear is multifactorial disease where destruction of tooth tissue is caused by means other than tooth decay or trauma. It is becoming increasingly common as people are keeping their teeth longer and consuming an acidic diet that erodes the teeth. It has also been suggested that in the current economic climate more people are habitually grinding their teeth at night due to stress causing damage to their teeth.

The different types of tooth wear:

Erosion: this is becoming increasingly common. It can be caused by acid consumed from the diet or from acid from the stomach.

Common foods and drinks that are acidic are:

- Alcoholic beverages, in particular cider
- Fruit juice and smoothies
- Fizzy soft drinks including sugar free
- Sports drinks
- Citric fruit and apples
- Pickles

Nausea and vomiting bring acid into the mouth and bulimia can cause severe tooth wear. Acid indigestion and heartburn are common and should be discussed with your GP. Even burping can bring acid into the mouth.

Attrition: This is wear caused by the teeth rubbing against each other during eating and when grinding or clenching teeth. Many people grind or clench their teeth at night – this is called Bruxism. Often people who do this are unaware of the habit.

Tooth brushing abrasion: Brushing vigorously can damage the teeth – often the check side of the upper teeth shows this types of tooth wear with the teeth dipping in here. It is important when using a manual toothbrush to brush gently and use a soft of medium toothbrush. An electric toothbrush will cause less damage if used correctly as only gentle pressure is applied to the teeth. The type of toothpaste you use will also affect abrasion and only low abrasive toothpaste should be used.

Abfraction: This is also tooth-wear at the 'neck of the tooth' (towards the gumline) and is more common on the cheek side of the premolar teeth. Dentists are still unsure of the definite cause of this type of tooth wear but it appears to be caused by the teeth chipping when biting together and is most common in people who clench their teeth. Early lesions can be detected by running the fingernail along the neck of the tooth.

What can be done?

Prevention of further wear

- Change habits such as brushing too hard
- Change diet – limit acidic foods/drinks
- Discuss treatment for acid regurgitation/heartburn with your GP
- Wear an appliance/bite guard at night
- Fillings can be placed to protect teeth

I have sensitive teeth what can be done?

- Sensitive toothpaste may help
- Limiting acidic foods/drinks will help
- Desensitising treatment may help
- Fillings over sensitive areas often relieve symptoms
- Dental x-rays may detect tooth decay which can cause sensitivity – often acidic drinks are also high in sugar (eg coca cola, cider)

My teeth look worn and jagged can the appearance be improved?

Worn teeth naturally appear older so make a smile look older. By restoring the teeth to their original size the appearance can be improved. Teeth can be restored/built up using composite resin, this is a minimally invasive treatment where white filling material is bonded to the tooth. In cases of severe tooth wear, veneers or dentin bonded crowns can be placed – again using a minimally invasive technique.

What is the procedure for “building up” the teeth with white fillings

The fillings are usually done over 2 visits at the first visit the teeth are built up using composite resin the same material we use to place white fillings in teeth. At the second visit the fillings are polished to remove any rough edges and to make sure we have provided you with an even bite.

At first after the fillings have been done your mouth will feel very strange. Your speech will be affected and you may lisp – this is because your tongue touches the tips of your teeth to make certain sounds and your tongue will need to learn the new position of the tip of your front teeth. Eating will be difficult since your back teeth will not meet, meaning you won't be able to chew food very well. After a couple of days of eating easy food you will start to learn how to eat with your new fillings and over the next few weeks to months your teeth will move until they all contact evenly again.

Maintenance

The nano-composite used to bond to the edges of the teeth will need polishing and repairing over time. It may become stained and may chip, occasionally the fillings may debond and need replacing.

Tooth Wear, Erosion, and night-time grinding What can be done?



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