

vomiting & dental care

Frequent vomiting by people with an eating disorder can cause both short- and long-term damage to dental health.

If you have an eating disorder, it is important that you understand the consequences of frequent vomiting and what you can do to minimise dental damage.

What Happens in Your Mouth When You Vomit?

When you vomit, the gastric acid from your stomach enters your mouth. Teeth are not designed to withstand gastric acids. When acid enters your mouth it erodes tooth enamel, which is the hard covering that protects your teeth from damage. When tooth enamel is worn out, your teeth become damaged.



Consequences of Frequent Vomiting



Dental damage can occur quickly, after as little as six months of frequent vomiting. Oral changes can include:

- Chemical erosion of tooth enamel - this can sometimes be so severe that teeth have to be replaced altogether, or repaired with resins or crowns (very expensive).
- Thermal hypersensitivity, involving increased sensitivity to hot and cold foods.
- Enlargement of the salivary glands - these can swell up, leading to what is known as “chipmunk cheeks”
- Teeth can become brittle and translucent

Minimising Damage

If you are suffering from an eating disorder and vomiting, follow the guidelines below to minimise damage to your teeth:

- Do not brush your teeth immediately after vomiting. This will cause further abrasion to tooth enamel.
- Rinse your mouth with water or a mixture of baking soda and water after vomiting. The baking soda neutralises the acid in your mouth.
- Floss and brush teeth daily to remove plaque.
- Use a fluoride toothpaste to reduce decay and tooth sensitivity.



Seek dental care

If you are suffering from an eating disorder, it is important to seek regular dental check-ups.



Most people with eating disorders find it hard to tell their dentist about their vomiting because they feel ashamed and guilty. Remember that your dentist is there to help you with your teeth and not to judge you.

Your dentist will be able to provide you with the best advice if s/he has the full picture about factors affecting your dental care. Remember that if your dental health is left unchecked it will continue to deteriorate.