

# Tooth wear



## What is tooth wear?

Tooth wear is a process whereby the enamel and dentine is gradually lost due to a range of factors, with the most common being dental erosion (wear caused by acids in the mouth). Having some degree of tooth wear is natural, however some patients experience more wear than normally expected. This can result in the following:

- Teeth can become shorter
- Wear cavities (holes) can appear
- Tooth chipping / fracturing
- Exposure of dentine giving the teeth a more yellow appearance



Severe tooth wear causing fractures of incisal edges



"Cupping" of teeth caused by acid erosion

## What are the symptoms of tooth wear?

- **Tooth sensitivity:** this is due to the enamel (protective outer layer) being worn away
- **Appearance:** patients may notice their teeth becoming shorter, cavitated or more yellow in appearance
- **Function:** some patients may find it more difficult to eat and speak if their teeth are very worn

## How is tooth wear diagnosed?

**Examination:** Your teeth are examined to identify the severity and location of tooth wear.

**Diet diary:** It is important to identify whether any acids in the diet are causing tooth wear.

**X-rays:** X-rays are sometimes taken to assess whether wear has caused disease in the nerve of the tooth and to help plan dental treatment.

## How is tooth wear treated?

**Prevention:** The most important part of treatment is to prevent the cause of tooth wear. Therefore, it is important the following risk factors are discussed:

- **Dietary acid:** carbonated drinks, fruit drinks/teas, flavoured waters, fruit and many other foods are acidic. You will be asked how often you consume acidic foods/drinks and advice will be given for how to eliminate them from your diet.
- **Reflux & vomiting:** acid from the stomach can cause tooth wear. You will be asked if you have experienced regular heartburn/reflux or vomiting. Advice will be given for how to manage this further.
- **Tooth grinding:** Some patients have the habit of grinding and clenching their teeth which can cause tooth wear. Advice and preventative treatment such as wearing a mouth guard will be discussed.
- **Tooth build-ups:** If there is enough remaining tooth left, some teeth can be restored with filling material or dental restorations such as crowns.

**Dentures:** When tooth wear is severe or affects the majority of teeth, dentures and overdentures can be used to replace worn teeth.



Before and after tooth build-ups



Before and after overdenture

**Crowns and onlays:** When there is not enough tooth left to build it up with a filling, restorations made in the dental lab such as crowns and onlays can be needed

## What are the benefits of tooth wear treatment?

Identifying the risk factors associated with tooth wear and eliminating them helps prevent further wear. Teeth are easier to build-up when tooth wear is minimal, therefore identifying and preventing tooth wear early is important.

Restoring worn teeth improves tooth appearance and can provide improved function when speaking and eating.

## What are the risks of tooth wear treatment?

Restorations to treat tooth wear require a high level of maintenance as they can chip, fracture and experience further wear. It is important that during treatment and after treatment completion you attend regular visits with a dentist to monitor the health of your teeth.

## What happens after treatment is finished?

To check that you and your dental professional are happy with the outcome of your treatment, you will be reviewed after your treatment is finished.

When all of your dental treatment is complete, you will be discharged from the dental school. We advise that you find a dentist outside the dental school to continue to look after your teeth and restorations.

## Types of questions you may want to ask

- Which of my teeth are affected by tooth wear?
- What do you think is causing my tooth wear?
- Are there any dietary changes I can make to prevent tooth wear?
- What kind of treatment do I need to treat my tooth wear?

## And finally...

Maintaining good oral hygiene is crucial for healthy teeth and gums, and will help reduce the risk of decay and gum disease. Brush your teeth twice daily for 2 minutes with fluoride toothpaste and clean between your teeth with floss or interdental brushes.

Smoking and alcohol increase the risk of oral disease. If you want to quit smoking or reduce your alcohol intake, please talk to the clinician you see for further advice.

It is important to attend dental check-ups regularly, as this will help your dentist to identify any dental disease early.

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