

Eating disorders and dental health

by Dr. Rick Borquez

With 25 million men and women suffering with some form of eating disorder in the U.S., dentists are becoming the first line of defense in detecting this disease among their patients. Bad breath, sensitive teeth and tooth erosion are some of the symptoms.

The National Eating Disorders Association estimates that nearly 10 million women and 1 million men are affected by anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa. Another 25 million suffer from binge eating dis-

orders

The damage from purging mostly occurs inside the upper front teeth. It causes erosion of the tooth enamel by the stomach acids.

Dentists who detect patients with eating disorders may recommend therapists and teach the patients how to minimize the effects of purging, a clear indicator of bulimia.

For example, patients should immediately rinse their mouth with soda water or use a sugar-free mouth rinse. Patients should swish water around their mouth if noth-

ing else is available and brush with a soft toothbrush and fluoride toothpaste. This is especially helpful if the signs of eating disorders are caught early.

Sometimes, eating disorders may not be discovered until too late, after irreversible damage has been done to the body as well as the teeth.

Although parents may not recognize that their children are anorexic or bulimic, they are often still taking them to the dentist on a regular recall schedule. Parents who suspect their child suffers from one of these disorders should consider visiting a dentist, who should be able to spot the warning signs and help point the parents in the direction to get help.

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