

Bulimia

Eating disorders have become so common in this weight-obsessed nation that we've been forced to face the facts. Too many young people – and some not so young – are caught up in the cycle of binge eating, then purging, to stay thin.

Bulimia is a problem for 500,000 people in this country. And because dental health is so closely tied to general health, we have to look at the larger picture.

Most victims of bulimia feel out of control. They want to stop, and can't, so they hide their secret. But bulimia shows in a patient's mouth. Here's what we see in someone addicted to binge-and-purge cycles:

- ❖ Enamel eating away on the insides of upper front teeth from daily exposure to stomach acids
- ❖ “Moth-eaten” edges of front teeth
- ❖ Heightened sensitivity to heat and cold; erosion has thinned tooth enamel
- ❖ Chemical erosion of enamel around fillings
- ❖ Soft tissue damage

Bringing bulimia under control takes time. But there are simple steps that will slow the erosion of teeth and gums. First, bulimics shouldn't brush after purging (brushing will only embed more acid in tooth enamel). They should use a sodium bicarbonate rinse. A bulimic could probably benefit from home fluoride treatments for damaged enamel. And there are de-sensitizing agents that can help teeth stand up to heat and cold.

If you (or someone you care about) are caught up in the cycle of bulimia, the important thing is to seek help in readjusting – not body image – but overall health.