

# Good Dental Health Promotes Happiness and Wellbeing

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It is not widely understood that neglected dental health, if not cared for, may lead to serious general health conditions, both physically and mentally. It seems to be widely held that dental decay is the most prominent cause of loss of tooth structure. In fact, there are many other more significant culprits of tooth loss. Attrition, abrasion and erosion of tooth structure all lead to destructive dental disorder. With the loss of tooth structure, there is resulting tooth sensitivity or pain, loss of function and compromised esthetics.

Equal to the physical impacts are possible consequent mental or emotional problems. An unpleasant smile often negatively impact ones personality, making one self conscious and even reluctant to smile. All forms of tooth loss should be identified, managed or restored to preserve the integrity of our dentition.

Discussed below are some facts and tips for the promotion and maintenance of good oral dental health.

## DENTAL DECAY

Tooth decay is the most prevalent chronic disease worldwide and there is a strong connection between the frequency of sugar-intake and tooth decay. The average Canadian consumes approximately half a cup of sugar per day with intake including soft drinks, power drinks, juices and ready to drink coffees and tea. The sugars we consume fuel the plaque containing bacteria on the surface of our teeth, resulting in an acid by-product, which decays tooth enamel and can lead to more severe conditions including pain, infection, tooth loss and even whole body sepsis.

**TIP-** It is very important to minimize sugar intake. By alternative, fruit juice consumption can be substituted with fluoridated water. If you don't have time to brush after a sugary treat, rinse your month with water, or munch on a fibrous fruit, raw vegetables or acid reducing cheese. Brushing twice daily with fluoridated toothpaste and flossing is a must!

## TEETH GRINDING

A more advanced cause of tooth loss is tooth wear as a result of biting stresses. Tooth wear can occur from grinding your teeth at night. Grinding or clenching often happens subconsciously and is by stress. If you experience headaches, clicking of the jaw, or facial muscle pain you are likely grinding your teeth while you sleep. In advanced cases, tooth loss in the form of 'notch shaped' indentations can also occur at the gumline.

**TIP -** Ask your dentist about fabricating you a bite plane to wear at night. This can stabilize these symptoms and prevent further tooth loss.

Grinding and tooth wear also occur if there is interference in your bite. Sometimes you will notice a premature contact when your teeth first come together or you may notice you have two completely different bites.

**TIP -** Having your bite adjusted (occlusal equilibration) by your dentist can completely address this by making your bite more stable. Wearing a bite plane can help manage interference with your bite.

## ACIDIC FOODS AND GASTRIC REFLUX

Additional culprits such as citric fruits, wine, fruit juices, vinegar, pickles, soda and even coffee are highly acidic and will frequently cause teeth erosion. It must be remembered that as few as "four acidic occasions " throughout the day can put our enamel at risk to acid wear.

**TIP -** Avoid foods with high acid content and limit the number of acid food intakes throughout the day. Celery, carrots, cauliflower and cucumbers are all healthy non-acidic alternatives.

Gastric acid reflux, the flow of stomach acid back through the esophagus into the oral cavity, could have the same impact on teeth as the acidic foods mentioned above.

**TIP -** Consult your doctor about medication to control acid reflex

## IMPROPER SELECTION AND USE OF TOOTHBRUSHES

Brushing with a hard bristled toothbrush or brushing heavy-handedly can cause tooth attrition at the gum line, resulting in gum recession and tooth sensitivity. Electric toothbrushes used regularly can also be too abrasive.

**TIP -** Be sure to always buy an ultra-soft toothbrush and use short gentle strokes to avoid tooth loss at the gum level. Sometimes tissue grafts and tooth coloured restorations can be placed to address gingival recession and sensitivity.

## SELECTION OF TOOTHPASTES

Toothpastes are often chosen on the basis of media advertising only. It is important to choose your toothpaste very carefully to ensure it does not contain detrimental components. Ingredients such as baking soda are very abrasive, causing enamel loss at the gumline and can also result in tooth sensitivity.

**TIP -** Choose your toothpaste after analyzing the advertised content on the container. Avoid using toothpastes with high percentage of bleaching peroxides for extended periods of time. If you have sensitive teeth, a toothpaste with higher flouride content is your best choice.

**BEFORE**



**Application of cosmetic bonding to treat tooth loss caused from a patient grinding their teeth.**

**AFTER**



## BAD HABITS

Unfortunately many people develop habits that may not only compromise tooth structure but also esthetics.

Nail biting will cause loss of tooth structure of the biting surface of the involved teeth with compromised esthetics as the teeth wear.

We often find in the dental profession tongue and lip rings are also culprits of chipping and thinning of the enamel surfaces of teeth. As tooth abrasion occurs, teeth can also become sensitive.

**TIP -** Practice avoiding these detrimental activities

IN THE EVENT OF PHYSICAL OR EMOTIONAL CONDITIONS RESULTING FROM LOSS OF TOOTH STRUCTURE, IT IS RECOMMENDED YOU CONSULT WITH YOUR DENTIST FOR RESTORATIVE OR CORRECTIVE OPTIONS.

## BIG TIP

All forms of tooth loss, not only tooth loss caused from dental decay, can and should be restored. Restorative intervention is particularly recommended if loss of tooth structure is into dentin and there is a complaint of sensitivity or an esthetic concern. Cosmetic bonding is a common procedure used in dental restorative care where a tooth coloured restoration can be placed to restore the integrity, esthetics and function of your teeth. Cosmetic bonding often requires no tooth preparation, is painless and can be achieved in one visit. It is often covered by private insurance and the results can be beautiful, yielding restorations that blend seamlessly to the rest of your dentition. Treatment not only restores the health of your teeth, but also the confidence in your smile!

**REMEMBER TO BOOK REGULAR BIENNIAL APPOINTMENTS WITH YOUR HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL.**

*Dr. Arab O'Malley operates Halifax Dental Studio in Clayton Park which focuses on the restoration of esthetic and wear using tooth preservation techniques. Dr. Arab O'Malley was recently recognized as Atlantic Canada's first internationally accredited cosmetic dentist.*

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