



Dr Angelo Lazaris is a leading expert in general and cosmetic dentistry. Using the latest state-of-the art technology and techniques, clients are assured of the most advanced treatment available. A contributor to top fashion magazines, Dr Lazaris has performed procedures on Channel Nine's Body Work and Fox 8's Australia's Search for the Next Top Model.

Eating disorders and dental damage

Question:

This is a bit of a hairy one regarding a phenomenon that is, unfortunately, increasing at a rapid rate in our modern era. I am a young woman who suffered bulimia for many years and am living with the dental consequences of this unhappy event. I have always been very particular with flossing and dental care but this has not been enough to curtail inevitable damage. The particular problems concern receded gums and "soft" areas of tooth around the gum line that are easily prone to decay or erosion. Some spaces have occurred between my teeth from gum recession. What periodontal treatment/surgery is available for this type of damage?

What has been your experience with tooth restoration for those recovering from an eating disorder? What would be the best options for me to look at in terms of best assisting my dental health as well as restoring lost aesthetics as the result of this damage?

I am doing everything I can now to look after my teeth but would appreciate your input as to what would be some helpful options open to me.

Answer:

You certainly are very familiar with dental terminology, so obviously you've done your homework!

As you have stated it IS a hairy and complicated one so I think the best way for me to give a considered response is by addressing each point in sequence.

Firstly, I can confirm that you are absolutely correct; damage to dental structures (gums, teeth and jaws) secondary to eating disorders is an increasingly frequent condition encountered in dental practice. Like eating disorders themselves, the associated dental problems are multifactorial and require comprehensive planning and treatment to ensure positive results. This often requires the combined efforts of a number of specialties within dentistry.

Regarding your first question about correction of altered gumlines, grafting procedures to reposition the gums are now becoming more frequent and successful in general. However predictable success in these procedures is still elusive and very much dependent on the condition and position of the papilla (the pointy bit of gum between the teeth) which in turn is dictated by the health and height of bone between the adjacent tooth roots. Given that you state that gaps are forming between the teeth, then this is the very area we are talking about. If it cannot be corrected with periodontal procedures, then other alternatives are sometimes viable: for instance reshaping teeth to have more oval contours to minimise or completely close these gaps. Of course this will be influenced by your other restorative needs.

The damage to the teeth is usually a combination of decay, acid erosion and attrition (or wear) and affect multiple surfaces on teeth. Unfortunately this often affects the teeth circumferentially, thereby weakening them substantially and making them prone to further problems. To complicate matters, the demineralised surfaces of the teeth are often harder to bond to, making conventional fillings prone to failure. The most ideal way to restore damaged tooth structure is to use porcelain (either inlays, veneers or crowns) as this material most closely replicates natural tooth enamel in its physical and optical properties, ensuring optimal strength and aesthetic results. Modern dentistry allows us to fabricate restorations that are very conservative (kind to the remaining tooth structure), enduring, and highly cosmetic. Obviously every case is different and needs to be assessed on its individual merits, but I find that porcelain is usually the treatment of choice in severely compromised teeth.

My final words of advice to you are:

- Treat the cause. Ensure your bulimia is under control, as this is what damaged your teeth in the first place, it will also damage any dental work you have done.
- Seek a dentist who has experience in complex restorative treatment. They should address your concerns in a systematic way and address all the issues as part of an integrated plan, involving the periodontal, restorative and cosmetic concerns you have. You play a significant role in this process so be specific and open about your condition, concerns and your treatment goals.
- If you are not completely satisfied with your dentist's treatment plan, then seek another opinion.
- Fluoride rinses are a good idea to help remineralize damaged tooth surfaces and protect from further breakdown
- Do NOT feel embarrassed about this or any condition when dealing with medical/dental professionals. The hard part of all this is over and this is all part of the recovery and rehabilitation process. Your dentist should treat this professionally, compassionately and non-judgementally.

I hope this has all helped.