Eating Disorders and Oral Health

- Bulimia nervosa is characterized by repeated, excessive eating, followed by self-induced vomiting.

- Vomiting results in the body being starved of vitamins, minerals, proteins and other nutrients that are important for maintaining good health which can lead to serious injuries affecting the major organs, muscles and even the teeth and oral health.

- Self-induced vomiting can cause erosion (wearing away by chemicals) of tooth structure by stomach acid. It may also lead to changes in colour of the teeth. Very sensitive teeth, bad breath, dry mouth, cracked, red and dry lips and mouth sores can all be results of eating disorders.

- The signs of anorexia nervosa include an extreme fear of gaining weight, a desire to be thin, the inability to maintain a normal weight based on height and age, self-induced starvation and vomiting after anything is eaten.

- Anorexia sufferers may experience weakening of the jaw bone resulting from osteoporosis.

- Steps that can be taken to lessen the effects of the acid on teeth and gums during recovery.
  - Avoid brushing teeth immediately after vomiting. The powerful stomach acids weaken tooth enamel, and brushing causes the enamel to erode quicker.
  - Rinse your mouth with water or a fluoride mouth rinse immediately after purging, if this habit is still continuing.
  - Dentists also recommend brushing daily with fluoridated toothpaste, then flossing to help reduce the chance of enamel erosion and gum disease.
  - A daily fluoride topical application (obtained from your dentist) may help prevent tooth decay and build stronger teeth.
  - Temporary appliances – such as mouth guards – may be recommended to prevent additional wear.

- Compulsive eating can cause obesity. A consequence of obesity is diabetes which in turn can result in gum disease. There may be the problem of decay due to repeated snacking.

- Once the patient has recovered from the eating disorder, fixing of the damaged and worn teeth can take place. Establishing an open and honest two-way communication with the dentist is the basis to regaining your smile.