

WHAT IS TOOTH WEAR?

By Dr Charlotte Withers, Dentist

Tooth wear is the non-carious (non-decay related) loss of tooth structure caused by mechanical and/or chemical processes. Tooth wear can lead to: sensitivity, pain or discomfort, changes in appearance (shortened, flattened, or cupped teeth), changes in the way the teeth bite together, and in severe cases, loss of tooth function.

There are three main types of tooth wear:

1. Attrition

Attrition is the loss of tooth structure caused by tooth-to-tooth contact. This occurs naturally over time during normal chewing. However, excessive wear may occur in individuals who grind or clench their teeth (bruxism), particularly at night.

2. Abrasion

Abrasion is caused by mechanical wear from external objects. It commonly appears along the gum line on the cheek side of the teeth and is often associated with brushing too hard. Other habits may include holding pens or hair grips in the mouth or tongue piercings.

3. Erosion

Erosion is the chemical loss of tooth structure caused by



acid exposure, without bacterial involvement.

- Extrinsic acids come from the diet (e.g., fizzy drinks, fruit juices, wine).
- Intrinsic acids originate from within the body (e.g., acid reflux or frequent vomiting).

How to prevent tooth wear

Attrition (Tooth Grinding)

- If wear is excessive for your age, grinding or clenching may be the cause.
- A custom-made nightguard can help protect the teeth from nocturnal grinding.

Abrasion (Mechanical Wear)

- Avoid brushing too hard — electric toothbrushes with pressure sensors can help.
- Avoid habits such as chewing pens or having oral piercings.
- Use non-abrasive toothpaste if recommended by your dentist.

Erosion (Acid Wear)

- If you experience symptoms of acid reflux, speak to your GP.
- Limit acidic drinks (fizzy drinks, juices, energy drinks).
- Consume acidic drinks within 30 mins or during meals rather than sipping throughout the day.
- Avoid brushing immediately after acidic exposure — wait at least 30–60 minutes.

Important to remember

Many patients experience a combination of wear types. Someone who frequently consumes acidic drinks and also grinds their teeth will typically experience faster tooth wear than someone who mainly drinks water but grinds occasionally. Early diagnosis and prevention are key. If you are concerned about tooth wear, your dentist can assess the severity and advise on appropriate management.

The Maltings
Dental Practice
Commercial Road, Grantham
01476 563181
www.maltingsdental.co.uk