

Letters to the editor

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Oral health

Case report: Unusual sugar binge

Sir, as in many workplaces, boxes of chocolates and mince pies jostle for space among healthier choices, such as the humble fruit bowl, in the staff kitchen at this time of year. Just this lunchtime as I was catching up on the latest *BDJ* and eating my quinoa and feta salad, I spied none other than our dental hygienist polishing off two mince pies chased down with a hazel whirl, a strawberry cream and a toffee penny. We were then joined in the staff room by our DCT who had availed himself of the festive options at the coffee shop on the corner with a large gingerbread flavoured milky coffee topped with whipped cream and drizzled with caramel sauce.

This seasonal over-consumption of sugar reminded me of a patient who came into the surgery way back in January: an unusual case which I would like to share with your readers.

The patient in question was an elderly male who presented with a facial swelling and difficulty closing his mouth. This was not immediately apparent, as the gentleman was particularly hirsute, with a thick beard and moustache that partially hid his mouth (Fig. 1).

On examination, it was noted that the patient's oral hygiene was poor, with generalised severe periodontal disease, many cavities and halitosis. He also had a large dental calculus on the maxilla arch, which explained the facial swelling and lack of labial sealing.

The patient was a non-smoker but it was observed that he was very overweight with a ruddy complexion. When I enquired as to his diet he reported that it was generally healthy for 364 days of the year (365 in leap years), but that over a 24-hour period each December he would binge on sweet



Fig. 1 The patient who reported bingeing on sugar just once a year

treats and short measures of alcohol. The patient, who was a verbose and jovial fellow, was given to outbursts of mirth that shook his whole person, despite the obvious oral discomfort it caused him, such that I was concerned for the stability of my dental chair.

He explained that his annual binge consisted in large proportion of mince pies but that he also consumed slices of chocolate log, rum truffles, biscuits and cookies of every variety, gingerbread, champagne truffles, kirsch cherries, Kendal Mint Cake, boiled sweets, baklava, macarons, shortbread, fruit cake, panettone and goodness knows what else. This was washed down with an assortment of spirits such as brandy, whisky and sherry. It was noted in the history that the large calculus had been progressively growing over a number of years but that the patient did not recall ever having sought dental evaluation before. He attended my clinic

because his oral condition was increasingly affecting his ability to eat, swallow and talk.

At a second appointment, the patient was submitted to deep scaling with peri-odontal curettes and dental extractions were performed due to the periodontal disease. He was open to discussion on how to improve his diet and his oral hygiene, and he pledged to replace his annual sugar binge with 'crunchy carrots' for the sake of his remaining teeth. I referred him on to our dental hygienist for regular appointments, but am informed the patient has left the country and has not yet returned this year.

K. Quinlan, by email

DOI: 10.1038/sj.bdj.2016.929

On your marks, get set... ROT!

Sir, I write regarding one of the biggest scourges to the country's teeth, indeed to our nation as a whole, in recent years: one 'Great British Bake Off'. I feel it is time for the judges of this sugar-filled show, namely Mary 'not very good for teeth' Berry and Paul 'flirting with decay' Hollywood, to be held to account. We all think it's a bit of fun, a bit of light relief but no, I think it's more serious than that. It's a disgrace and I, for one, want to put a stop to it. I know the BBC have already put a stop to it for different reasons but I wish everyone would just stop baking.

Forget about soggy bottoms, it's decaying teeth that concern me. Every time Paul Hollywood shakes a simpering contestant's hand to congratulate them on another cake or rather 'tooth death trap' well made, he might as well shake plaque's hand instead and lay out the welcome mat for sugar in the nation's collective mouths. The signature bake presents a signature danger to teeth, the technical challenge a challenge to all oral health and what they term the famous 'showstopper' is frankly just a 'sugardropper'.