

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'.

I know *some* people will say that cakes and biscuits are okay as a treat now and again, especially if eaten with meals, and these people will maintain that limits not bans are the most effective and realistic way to approach our sugar addiction, but I think they should be outlawed. I say make the nation go cold turkey on fun... I mean cake.

With this in mind, I propose that Paul Hollywood and Mary Berry be stripped of their titles as the King and Queen of Bakers respectively. Calling them so is an affront to our Royal Family. They are cake-peddling hacks stripping joy from the people and replacing it with adipose and decay.

B. T. H. E. Grincher, Hooille, Rantshire

DOI: 10.1038/sj.bdj.2016.930

Working conditions

Elfless hard labour

Sir, I write to convey my utter dismay at the quite frankly abhorrent working conditions we elves are subjected to in the North Pole; conditions I believe you may also experience in the dental profession on occasion.



Composite. ©lumpyneedles/DigitalVision Vectors/Getty

On arrival at the Central North Pole workshop, I was greeted by the sight of 400-500 small men and women crushed into a space that isn't big enough to perform a scale and polish in. They were all expected to work in a monotonous yet happy manner, which deeply disturbed me. Expectations are set incredibly high – they are expected to make 1,000 Jack-in-the-boxes in a day – yet there is no fee per toy made system here, so I'm struggling to work out how these people

are making a living. There are rumours that a secondary workshop down the road is paying twice as much for the same work, so if things do not improve I shall be forced to seek alternate employment.

The workforce is mostly made up of associate elves struggling to make a living. A number of my friends work in multiple locations throughout the year and don't have the same employment rights as the staff elves. Many more are twiddling their elvish thumbs as they refuse to work under such lamentable conditions. This is fundamentally wrong.

What dismays me the most is that the boss – a rather large chap with what I can only describe as an 'off white' beard – expects the younger members of staff to work seven days a week due to 'high demand'. I have spoken with the local trade representative who informs me these workers did not have a choice in the matter. I find the notion of working under the imposed conditions rather distasteful.

I hope by bringing this matter to the attention of your profession and others more workers will feel supported to come forward and register their displeasure at these working conditions.

B. Elf, New York, via magic sleigh

DOI: 10.1038/sj.bdj.2016.931

Dental trauma

Ho, ho, hospitalised

Sir, I write to you regarding the significant increase of dental trauma over the Christmas period. Our emergency dental clinic is pushed to the limit at this time and patterns of causes have begun to emerge.

1. Yuletide stress leading to tooth wear

Last year a patient presented with a cracked molar caused by excessive grinding of her teeth. She explained that the arrival of her in-laws and their insistence on listening to Cliff Richard's '*Mistletoe and Wine*' on repeat was just the beginning of a tricky Christmas. The stress was exacerbated by burning the turkey, running out of brandy and having to sit through the Queen's speech. The patient noted that she heard the tooth crack during a particularly frustrating (and tedious) game of Trivial Pursuit

2. Misuse of toys

I am frequently perplexed by children's insistence on biting toys and/or placing them in their mouths. A few years ago I had the unfortunate pleasure of removing a Lego figure's head from a tooth. It looked like a novelty crown

3. TV arguments

Two years ago a patient had reportedly lost a tooth during a heated debate over the quality of that year's John Lewis advert. I assured the patient that she was correct, Monty the Penguin is annoying and The Beatles' version of *Real Love* is far superior.

D. Kay, by email

DOI: 10.1038/sj.bdj.2016.932

Infection control

Mistletoe threat

Sir, I would like to bring to your attention a hidden danger of the festive period.

2016 has been a terrible year. We have mourned the loss of Bowie, Rickman and Harambe; a cartoon villain will soon be leader of the most powerful nation on earth; and last but not least the sacred shape of the Toblerone has been changed. Therefore, I urge your readers to not make it any worse and avoid cross infection during this disease-heavy time of year. Obviously I'm not saying you should refrain from giving your partner their annual Christmas day hug, but I would strongly warn against any sub-mistletoe promiscuity.

Such incidents occur frequently at Christmas parties. I have therefore decided to ban them from our practice get-together. Mistletoe is neither appropriate nor hygienic for such an environment.

Unless you asked Father Christmas for mononucleosis, herpes or even just a common cold, mistletoe and this harmful tradition are best avoided.

I am hopeful that this information is old news for much of the population. For the past few years I have conducted my own study and have stood under many a mistletoe without being approached for a kiss once! I'm happy that so many of my colleagues are considerate of cross-infection even after a few mulled wines.

A. Bore, by email

DOI: 10.1038/sj.bdj.2016.933

Note to readers: These letters have been created for the entertainment of readers in the spirit of seasonal good humour and, on the whole, are entirely fictional.