

Tooth loss exacts significant emotional toll

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(Medical Xpress)—Academics have called for tooth loss to be taken more seriously, after new research revealed the full impact it can have on patients' lives.

The study, by researchers at Newcastle University and published in the journal *Sociology of Health and Illness*, found that participants were devastated by their [tooth loss](#) which some compared to losing an arm or leg. Some people were so affected by their tooth loss that they avoided leaving the house. Others reported that they felt they had 'failed' because they needed dentures or that their tooth loss had aged them.

The research suggests that tooth loss can be as disruptive to people's lives as other [chronic medical conditions](#). Over 2 million people in the UK have lost all their [teeth](#) from either their top or bottom jaw or have no teeth left at all.

Dr Nikki Rousseau, researcher on the project said: "We were surprised by the impact that tooth loss had on people. Tooth loss isn't usually thought of as an illness or taken as seriously as needing a knee replacement for example. People feel it's acceptable to make jokes about false teeth, but we may have underestimated the distress that tooth loss causes.

Thirty nine adults from the North East of England, ranging in age from mid-twenties to eighty, were interviewed about their experiences of tooth loss and replacement. Dental implant treatments are now available, which offer a more secure alternative to conventional dentures, but these can cost thousands of pounds, as the treatment is not normally covered by the NHS.

"Maybe that is something we need to look at and we should start to view tooth loss more like a [chronic illness](#) which needs to be treated."

Dr Catherine Exley, Senior Lecturer at Newcastle University and the lead on this Medical Research Council funded project, said: "At one time losing all

or most of your teeth was commonplace, but now people generally expect to keep their teeth for far longer, and therefore the effect of losing them may be far greater. We know that many chronic conditions have significant impacts on people's lives, but tooth loss is rarely thought of in the same way, and it is surprising how little research has been done in this area."

More information: Rousseau, N., Steele, J., May, C. and Exley, C. (2013), 'Your whole life is lived through your teeth': biographical disruption and experiences of tooth loss and replacement. *Sociology of Health & Illness*. doi: 10.1111/1467-9566.12080

Provided by Newcastle University

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