

# **Integrating Oral Health into Adolescent Healthcare**

Effective strategies to foster collaboration between dental professionals and adolescents for optimal care delivery

## Oral health and adolescence<sup>1,2,3,4,5</sup>



Oral health is an integral part of good overall health and wellbeing



Poor oral health can lead to several illnesses and has been linked to poor diabetes control and coronary artery disease



Adolescence—the critical period of transition from childhood to adulthood, typically encompassing ages 10 to 19 years—is particularly vulnerable to poor oral health

## Rapid changes make adolescents vulnerable to various risk factors, including oral health issues<sup>6,7,8</sup>



Hormonal shift and

Dental phobia





Psychological and social changes



Cognitive and physical changes



Inattention to oral hygiene



Poor nutritional habits



Increased aesthetic awareness



Oral piercings



**Risk factors** 

Substance abuse: consumption of tobacco, alcohol, and drugs



Pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases

#### High risk of:



Caries



Periodontal disease



Malocclusion



trauma



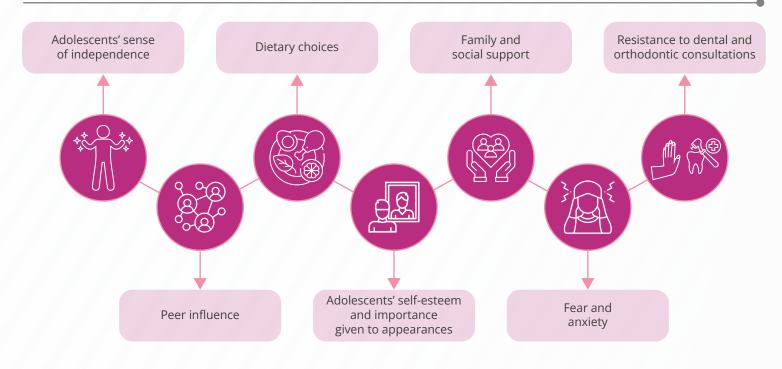
Oral healthcare is the most overlooked and unmet healthcare need in adolescents<sup>2</sup>



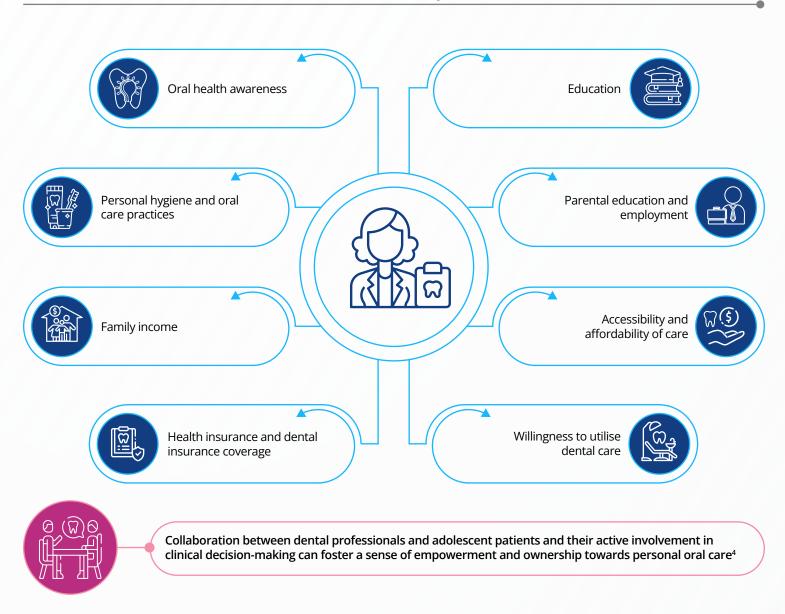
Comprehensive assessment of oral health in adolescents can help address their unique oral health issues<sup>2</sup>



## While addressing oral health concerns in adolescents, dental professionals must consider<sup>2</sup>:



## Factors that influence the use of oral health services by adolescents9





Dental professionals must adopt, train, and use motivational one-on-one interviewing techniques to address oral health behaviour problems among adolescents<sup>2,6</sup>



Encourage healthy eating habits, advocate reducing energy drinks and soft drinks by suggesting dietary modifications



Counsel on the risks associated with tobacco, alcohol, and drug use and encourage abstinence



Emphasize the benefits of early prevention of caries and other oral complications



Encourage behavioural management and inculcate preventive oral healthcare measures



Advocate the use of protective gear during sports activities



Advise against oral piercings and educate patients on ensuring hygiene of oral jewellery



Suggest the use of dental sealants and fluoride varnishes when necessary; recommend toothpaste with adequate fluoride concentration for adolescents at higher risk of caries. Recommend using stannous fluoride toothpastes for better biofilm removal



Encourage yearly dental visits



Facilitate smooth transition to adult oral care



Educate on human papillomavirus infection and the importance of early vaccination



Use technological advancements, such as smartphones, applications, and computer games, to improve compliance



Integration of oral and general adolescent health, and interdisciplinary collaborations can help ensure timely prevention and deliver comprehensive oral care in adolescents 10,11,12,13

#### Successful collaborations usually involve:



Primary care physicians



Paediatric dental professionals



Community health workers



Registered dietitians



Nurse practitioners

### Interdisciplinary collaborations to foster optimal care delivery should focus on:



Increasing collaborations between dental and other healthcare professionals



Including oral health discussions during physical examination



Facilitating dental referrals when needed



Gathering information regarding eating and lifestyle habits during oral and general health check-ups



Fostering collaboration of dental professionals with schools and educational institutes for regular oral health assessments



Stepping up oral health screening and awareness programs in community settings



Training dental and other healthcare professionals on strategies to address the unique needs of adolescents



Evaluating the mental health of at-risk adolescents with the intervention of psychologists to improve compliance and treatment adherence

## Barriers to integrated oral care<sup>11</sup>



Insurance coverage



Accessibility and affordability for vulnerable and under-represented adolescent populations



Lack of suitable oral healthcare policies



Implementation challenges



Lack of interdisciplinary education and awareness



Lack of dental health workforce

## **Key message**

A patient-centric approach and integration of oral healthcare in primary clinical settings can help improve the management of oral health in adolescents

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