

Oral Health and You: A Guide for Adolescents

Promoting lifelong oral health through insights into oral care, education, and preventive practices



Oral health and hygiene practices lay the foundation for overall good health and well-being in all individuals¹

Adolescence, which spans the ages from 10–19², marks the transition from childhood to adulthood¹

Growth



This transition period is accompanied by rapid changes in^{1,3}:



Social interactions

Hormonal regulation and physiology



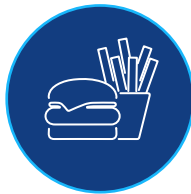
Health-related behaviours

Common oral health problems that you may encounter as an adolescent

Adolescents face specific oral health challenges that are distinct from the challenges experienced by other age groups^{1,3}



Tendency for poor oral hygiene



Dietary habits



Higher risk of caries



Gum disease



Dental trauma



Orthodontic treatments for dental alignment

Additional risk is posed by¹:



Eating disorders and nutritional deficiencies



Use of harmful substances – tobacco, nicotine, gum, alcohol, and recreational drugs



Oral piercings

Understanding these factors and challenges takes us one step closer to ensuring effective oral care

Oral care practices to maintain good oral hygiene^{1,4}

The first step to ensuring oral health is keeping your mouth clean. To do so, you must:



- ✓ Brush twice daily for no less than 2 minutes with fluoridated toothpaste



Remove plaque using a manual or an electric toothbrush

Oscillating-rotating toothbrushes have been found to be more effective at plaque removal than sonic toothbrushes in adolescent orthodontic patients⁵



- ✓ Floss regularly or use an interdental brush to keep the spaces between your teeth clean



- ✓ Schedule routine dental and periodontal check-ups



- ✓ Prevent caries through the use of sealants and fluoride varnishes



- ✓ Ensure repair and restoration of cavities with professional help



In addition to these oral care practices, it is recommended to be aware of and comply with public health interventions, including human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination, as adolescence and youth are periods when individuals tend to engage in risk-taking behaviours⁶

Fluorides help to prevent and arrest caries^{1,4}



- Toothpastes with 1,450 ppm of fluoride are recommended for children above six years of age and adolescents
- Stannous fluoride toothpastes have antibacterial properties and are effective in the prevention of gum problems and oral malodour
- Stannous fluoride and sodium fluoride toothpastes have anticavity properties



Upon advise of a dental professional/oral hygienist, you may use a toothpaste with up to 5,000 ppm fluoride if you are an adolescent at an increased risk of caries

Seek professional help¹



As with all ailments, timely prevention of oral issues is better than their cure

Dental professionals are like our oral health safety belts; they not only take care of oral health problems, but can also provide helpful oral care tips

Visit your dental professional regularly to prevent and address oral care problems

Nutrition influences oral health



Nutrition and oral health are closely linked; so, choose what you eat wisely!



The relationship between oral health, nutrition, and chronic conditions is multi-faceted and complex^{1,3}

Improper nutrition can lead to^{1,3}:



Several dietary factors contribute to poor oral health during your adolescence^{1,3}



Shift toward processed foods



Eating non-standard but popular diets (fad diets) that promise quick and easy weight loss



Vitamin and mineral deficiencies



Alcohol consumption



Malnutrition

Besides, consuming higher proportions of the following can trigger or worsen your existing oral health problems^{1,3}



Refined carbohydrates and processed junk foods



Foods and drinks with high sugar content



Carbonated/acidic drinks like sodas



High-energy sports drinks



Caffeinated drinks

However, it is possible to address these nutrition-related oral health issues by following a holistic management approach that encompasses^{1,3}:



Diet counselling



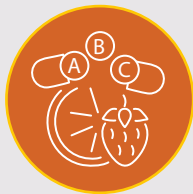
Consuming a balanced diet



Drinking sufficient quantities of water



Making healthy food choices



Eating foods rich in micronutrients



Assessing oral care and nutrition status comprehensively

Lifestyle risk factors and oral health

The risks of oral piercings and jewellery^{1,7}

Ornamental piercings in the oral cavity, including on the lip, tongue, and cheek, although a popular trend, can cause long-term local and systemic complications and must be worn with caution



Local complications of oral piercing

- Tooth chipping
- Pain
- Difficulty in chewing and talking
- Abrasion
- Ulceration
- Inflammation and gum swelling
- Tooth mobility
- Tissue injury
- Infection
- Sensitivity
- Inhalation or airway risk
- Risk for bleeding

Systemic complications

- Infection
- Allergies
- Impaired neurological and vascular function

It is important to be informed about oral hygiene and the proper maintenance of jewellery to prevent permanent damage and potentially life-threatening systemic complications

Dental trauma

Up to 25% of adolescents experience dental trauma resulting from¹:



- Falls
- Accidental collisions
- Sports and recreational activities
- Violence

- ✔ Stay informed of preventive measures to avoid dental trauma^{1,8}
- ✔ Use size-, age-, and sport/activity-appropriate mouthguards or faceguards to avoid traumatic injuries and permanent damage^{1,8}

Substance abuse typically begins during adolescence and can have a significantly negative long-term impact on oral health^{1,9,10}

Risk factors include:



- Smoking and consuming smokeless tobacco
- Using alternative nicotine products like e-cigarettes
- Vaping
- Drinking alcohol
- Using recreational drugs

Substance abuse can lead to:



- Bad breath or halitosis
- Extrinsic staining
- Tooth decay
- Tissue damage
- Cancer

Adolescent patients consuming tobacco/drug/alcohol should seek health education and counselling to discontinue substance abuse^{1,10}

Key messages

- ✔ Adolescence poses distinct oral health challenges that require special attention and care
- ✔ In addition to issues with oral hygiene, lifestyle factors such as diet, substance use, and trauma can negatively impact oral health
- ✔ However, by continuing with the good oral hygiene practices learnt during childhood, regularly visiting dental professionals, eating a balanced and healthy diet, and avoiding harmful lifestyle practices, it is possible to maintain healthy teeth and gums

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