

TEENAGER'S TEETH

Q Why is a healthy smile important?

A An attractive and healthy smile is important when meeting people and making friends. It can also boost your confidence to help you feel good about yourself.

If you don't look after your teeth and gums properly you could suffer from a number of different conditions that will make you stand out from the crowd for all the wrong reasons:

- bad breath
- stained teeth
- tooth decay
- gum disease
- tooth loss
- dental erosion.

Q Why is a healthy diet important for my oral health?

A Every time you eat or drink anything sugary, your teeth are under acid attack for up to one hour. This is because the sugar will react with the bacteria in plaque and produce harmful acids. Plaque is a build-up of bacteria which forms on your teeth and gums.

It is better to have three or four meals a day and avoid frequent snacking.

Q What is dental erosion?

A Dental erosion is the loss of tooth enamel caused by acid attacks. Enamel is the hard, protective coating of the tooth. If it is worn away the dentine underneath is exposed and your teeth can look discoloured and become sensitive.

Q Can acidic foods and drinks and fizzy drinks cause dental erosion?

A Yes. Still water and milk are the best things to drink. Tea without sugar is also good for teeth as it contains fluoride.

Drink fruit juice at mealtimes. If you want to drink fruit juices between meals, try diluting them with water.

Q Can I eat between meals?

A If you need to eat between meals avoid sugary snacks, try these foods instead:

- plain popcorn
- nuts
- cheese
- breadsticks
- plain yoghurt
- rice cakes
- cheese scones
- unsweetened cereal
- crumpets
- plain bagels
- fresh soup
- raw vegetable pieces
- fresh fruit.

Q What effects will smoking, alcohol or taking drugs have on my oral health?

A Smoking can cause tooth staining, gum disease, tooth loss and – more seriously – mouth cancer. Smoking is also one of the main causes of bad breath.

Alcoholic drinks can also cause mouth cancer. Smoking and drinking together further increases the risk of developing mouth cancer.

Alcohol can also increase the risk of tooth decay and erosion. Some alcoholic drinks have a lot of sugar in them, and some mixed drinks may contain acids. So they can cause decay or dental erosion if you drink them often and in large amounts.

Illegal drugs can lead to a range of health problems. Smoking cannabis can have the same effects as smoking tobacco. Other drugs can cause a dry mouth, and

increase the risk of erosion, decay, gum disease and bad breath. Drugs can also cause you to grind your teeth, which can cause headaches and other problems.

Q How do I look?

A Some people are unhappy with how their teeth look and feel self-conscious smiling in photos or in social situations. But you can have treatment to correct any problems.

Q How can I improve my smile?

A Braces straighten or move your teeth to improve their appearance and the way they work. They can also help to improve the long-term health of your teeth, gums and jaw joints by spreading the biting pressure over all the teeth.

There are many different braces and your dentist or orthodontist will be able to talk to you about what is best for you.

Q How long will I need to wear a brace?

A It depends on how severe the problem is, and it may take anything from a few months to two and a half years. However, most people can be treated in one to two years.

Q What is tooth jewellery?

A Tooth jewellery involves sticking small jewels onto the teeth using dental cement. They should be fitted by a dentist, who can also easily remove them if necessary.

It is important to keep the area around the jewel clean as plaque can easily build up around it and you will be more likely to get tooth decay.

Q What are the dangers of mouth piercing?

A The dangers of mouth piercing are:

- Infection
- Possible inflammation of the surrounding tissues

- Blood infections
- The tongue can swell
- Chipping and breaking of other teeth
- Speech, eating and swallowing can be difficult
- Oral hygiene is difficult to keep up
- Dental treatment can be difficult.

Q How can I protect my teeth when playing sports?

A A mouthguard will help protect you against broken and damaged teeth and even broken or dislocated jaws.

It is important to wear a professionally made mouthguard whenever you play any sport that involves contact or moving objects.

Ask your dentist about a mouthguard. It is a small price to pay for peace of mind.

Q What is your best advice?

A Top tips for looking after teenagers' teeth are:

- Brush your teeth twice a day with fluoride toothpaste. Use a small- to medium-sized brush with soft to medium bristles and brush for two minutes.
- Limit sugary food and drinks to meal times.
- Visit your dentist at least once a year.
- Floss once a day to help remove plaque and food from between your teeth.
- Use a mouthwash to freshen your breath and kill bacteria.
- Use a straw with fizzy drinks as this helps them to go to the back of your mouth and reduces the number of acid attacks on your teeth.
- Wait for at least one hour after eating or drinking anything acidic before you brush your teeth.
- Chew sugar-free gum after eating to help make more saliva and neutralise the acids which form in your mouth after eating.