



## Teens and Oral Health

Teenagers' lifestyle habits, such as their diet and their intent to express themselves, may have a lasting impact on the health of their teeth and gums, and the rest of their body. Many teens use quick meals and carbonated beverages to stay on the move, but sugar-loaded drinks and foods may have irreversible effects on oral health.

Teenagers also look for interesting ways to express themselves, such as oral piercings, or they may not view braces or protective sports gear as a welcome addition to their appearance. Here is some information you can give your teen on the benefits and the risks of these choices.

### Sodas, sugar and their effects on teen bodies

Carbonated beverages may be behind an increase in cavities for today's teens. Studies show acids in these drinks break down tooth enamel, which may lead to extensive dental treatments and, eventually, tooth loss.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, phosphoric acid (found in regular and diet sodas) may reduce bone density. By age 16, girls have accumulated 90 to 97 percent of their bone mass, yet only 19 percent of girls ages nine to 19 are getting the recommended daily allowance of calcium.<sup>1</sup>

### Piercings and oral health risks

This fashion statement may create a number of potential oral health risks, such as infection from bacteria in the mouth or damage to teeth from the metal jewelry.

### When to get braces

Braces do more than improve your smile — they also help with dental function. Crooked or crowded teeth can make it hard to brush and floss and, over time, can lead to tooth decay, gum disease and tooth loss.<sup>2</sup> Your dentist may recommend a visit to an orthodontist if they feel that braces are necessary.

### Sports and teeth

Preventing accidents is not always possible, but following basic safety guidelines can help guard against injuries. If your child plays high-impact sports such as hockey, basketball or soccer, buy a faceguard or mouth guard for practices and games.<sup>2</sup>

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Talk to your teen about the long-term effects of sugary drinks and foods and protect them against oral injuries to be sure they'll have a healthy smile now and for years to come.

<sup>1</sup>"Fast-paced Lifestyle Eroding Teens' Teeth", Academy of General Dentistry, [www.knowyourteeth.com/infobites/abc/article/?abc=f&iid=33&aid=1335](http://www.knowyourteeth.com/infobites/abc/article/?abc=f&iid=33&aid=1335), accessed 4/2017.

<sup>2</sup>"Young Adult (18-22 years) Dental and Oral Health Care", Delta Dental Plans Association, <http://oralhealth.deltadental.com/YoungAdult/Safety/22,21543>, accessed 4/2017.