

## IMPROVING YOUR SMILE

# Teens and their teeth



One of the first things someone notices about you is your smile, so looking after your teeth and gums **NOW** can improve your 'smile' and help you avoid dental problems as you get older.

## Tell me about...

If you are beginning to have concerns about your oral health, here are a few things you may want to find out more about...

### Tooth decay (caries)

This can occur if plaque, a sticky film made up of food debris, bacteria and dead cells, is allowed to accumulate on teeth. The tiny bacteria that live in plaque feed on sugars in our diet to form acids, which attack tooth enamel. Tooth decay is difficult to see just by looking, as the tooth is destroyed from the inside out. This means your dentist will need to drill out the decay and fill the resulting cavity with a silver amalgam or white filling.

- Avoid the risk of acid attacks by limiting your sugar intake to mealtimes and reducing between-meal snacks – especially food/drink with a high sugar content.
- Clean teeth and strengthen tooth enamel by brushing twice a day with a fluoride-containing toothpaste for at least 2 minutes each time.

### Calculus (tartar) build-up

If plaque is not removed from teeth for a long period it hardens into calculus, which tends to form as yellowish deposits where the teeth meet the gums and in between teeth. Some people are more prone to calculus than others, but once formed, it cannot be removed with brushing alone and needs to be removed by a dentist or hygienist.

## Did you know?

**1** Development of a full set of adult teeth (32 in all) can take over 15 years and ends when the wisdom teeth finally appear (usually between the ages of 17 and 21).



**2** Like a fingerprint, the pattern of your teeth and the size and shape of your tongue is unique to YOU.

**3** The different parts of your mouth work together with the lubricating effect of saliva to break down food, distinguish tastes, help us to swallow and allow speech.

**4** Sugar is added to many foods and drinks and is widely used as a natural sweetener – a standard can of coke has nine teaspoons of sugar.

**5** When it comes to oral health in adults: around 90% have dental decay (caries), more than 75% have gum disease (gingivitis) and one in two people suffer from bad breath (oral malodor).

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- Your dental practitioner may suggest scaling and polishing to remove calculus build-up using special cleaning tools.
- To prevent or slow down the build-up of calculus you should remove plaque with regular brushing and flossing – paying particular attention to the areas along the gum margin and between the teeth.

### Gum disease (gingivitis or periodontitis)

If your gums become red, inflamed and swollen, you may have gum disease, which can also cause your gums to bleed when brushing. It is normally caused when bacteria in plaque start to release toxins that irritate gums and cause inflammation. If left unchecked, gums may recede and expose the tooth root – this may eventually lead to complex oral health problems and even tooth loss.

- Remove plaque from teeth, between teeth and along the gum margin with regular brushing and flossing.
- Visit your dentist every 6 months for a check-up on teeth and gums.

### Bad breath (oral malodor)

Many people experience bad breath, at least occasionally, and in most cases it is the result of bacterial activity in the mouth producing foul-smelling substances. Deal with it by reducing the amount of bacteria in your mouth.

- Try using a toothpaste that contains, in addition to fluoride, antibacterial ingredients which will help remove bacteria and directly fight malodor.
- Flossing, use of mouthwash and tongue brushing/scraping may also be helpful.

### Crooked teeth

Orthodontics is the term given to the straightening or moving of teeth to improve their appearance and functionality. Sometimes called a retainer or braces, orthodontic appliances may be removable, functional or fixed and newer versions are virtually invisible when they are being worn.

- Your dentist will advise or may refer you to an orthodontist.
- If you need to wear an orthodontic appliance, an effective oral hygiene routine is essential to remove food debris, plaque and bacteria build-up.

### Teeth and sport

Any sport that involves physical contact or moving objects could result in broken and damaged teeth or even an injury to your jaw, and it is important to protect teeth and gums properly.

- Standard or custom-made mouth guards are available.
- A lost tooth can be saved if it is replaced in the socket immediately. Bite down to keep it in place or put it inside your cheek and seek emergency treatment.

**Your dentist will be able to talk to you about any dental procedures that you may need and they may refer you to a hygienist for advice on maintaining a good oral hygiene routine.**

### Checklist for healthy teeth

**1** **Keep diet on track:** limit the amount of refined sugary foods and drinks, and preferably restrict these to mealtimes.

**2** **Reduce risk of acid attacks:** try to opt for low-sugar snacks and drink sugary drinks through a straw to avoid contact with teeth.

**3** **Choose a fluoride toothpaste:** the introduction of fluoride toothpaste is one of the most important factors in reducing dental decay. Fluoride helps strengthen teeth making them more resistant to decay.



**Two minute rule:** brushing for at least 2 minutes morning and night with a fluoride toothpaste not only cleans but allows more time for fluoride to work and helps keep tooth enamel strong.

**5** **Daily flossing:** regular flossing will help remove plaque build-up from along the gum margin and between the teeth and help reduce the risk of calculus build-up and gum disease.

**6** **Be mouth aware:** take responsibility for your own oral health. This will help you maintain a healthy, attractive smile and minimise the need for dental treatment in later years.