

WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT TEENAGERS' ORAL HEALTH

Teenagers typically are busy with school, extracurricular activities and social commitments. But while maintaining an active lifestyle, it's important that they remember to make wise, nutritious choices to keep their mouth and teeth healthy.



Which foods and beverages should I avoid?

Avoid sugary foods and beverages such as candy, desserts, fruit and vegetable juices. Sugar fuels the bacteria that produce acid and cause tooth decay, the most common chronic disease among children.

Carbohydrates such as chips, bread, pasta or crackers also promote acid-causing bacteria, so they can be just as harmful to your teeth as sugar. Healthy snack options include nuts, raw vegetables, fruit, cheese or plain yogurt.

Should I limit the amount of soda that I drink?

Yes. Consider that a typical, 12-ounce can of regular soda contains approximately 10 teaspoons of sugar. Not only is sugar harmful to teeth, but acidic flavor additives can also

erode and damage tooth enamel. Sugar-free diet soda also is bad for your teeth; all types of soda contain acid that can cause tooth erosion.

There are simple ways you can limit the harmful effects of sodas. Try sipping soda through a straw; doing this will cut down the contact the beverage has with your teeth. Also, rinse your mouth with water after drinking soda. It can also reduce the risk of cavities.

Should I avoid sports drinks?

Sports drinks have become popular in recent years among adolescents who want to increase their energy levels and who may believe that these drinks are "better for them" than soda. However, keep in mind that the acidity levels in such sports drinks can cause acid erosion, too. After you drink one, wait at least an hour to brush your teeth to avoid increasing the erosive action.

Why should I avoid tobacco?

Tobacco use is the leading preventable cause of death in the United States, and it's important that teenagers avoid starting a tobacco-use habit that can continue into adulthood. Tobacco users are putting themselves at risk of developing nicotine dependence; health conditions such as asthma, cancer, and heart and respiratory disease; and oral conditions such as gum disease, halitosis (bad breath), the staining and loosening of teeth and tooth loss. Most importantly, tobacco can cause oral cancer.

Why should I avoid oral piercings?

People can chip teeth on oral piercings, such as tongue piercings, while they're eating, sleeping, talking and chewing on the jewelry. Tongue piercings commonly cause fractured teeth. The fracture can be confined to tooth enamel and require a filling, or it may go deeper – in which case, there may be a need for a root canal or tooth extraction. Infections are also common with oral piercings.

What's the best way to maintain my oral health?

In addition to visiting your dentist for regular checkups and cleanings at least twice a year, it's important to brush your teeth for two minutes twice a day, with either a manual or an electric toothbrush. Consider carrying a travel-size toothbrush with you in your backpack to ensure you're maintaining your oral hygiene even when you're on-the-go.