



## Bright Futures Oral Health in Adolescence

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### *Adolescence (11-21 years)*

#### ***Oral Hygiene***

- Schedule a dental visit according to the schedule recommended by your dentist, based on your individual needs and susceptibility to disease.
- If you have special health care needs, make appointments for more frequent dental visits based on your individual needs and susceptibility to disease.
- Obtain assistance with brushing your teeth, if needed, and obtain special oral health equipment (e.g., a mouth prop) to complete the task.
- Brush your teeth twice a day (after breakfast and before bed) with fluoridated toothpaste, and floss daily. Spit out the toothpaste after brushing, but do not rinse with water. The small amount of fluoridated toothpaste that remains in your mouth helps prevent tooth decay.
- Become familiar with the normal appearance of your gums and teeth so that you can identify problems if they occur (see Tooth Eruption Chart on pages 78–79).<sup>W</sup>
- Take fluoride supplements only as prescribed by a dentist or physician, based on the risk of developing tooth decay and the known level of fluoride in your drinking water (see Systemic Fluoride Supplements: Recommended Dosage on page 84).<sup>W</sup>
- Discuss with a dentist or other qualified health professional the need to apply

fluoride topically (via varnishes, gels, foams), which renews the high levels of fluoride in the outer layer of the tooth enamel. Topical fluoride may be especially effective for adolescents at high risk for tooth decay because they have a history of decay, are not exposed to fluoridated water, snack frequently on foods containing sugar, or have a medical problem that decreases their resistance to decay.

- Discuss with a dentist or other qualified health professional the need to apply dental sealants (thin plastic coatings applied to pits and fissures on the chewing surfaces of the teeth) to prevent tooth decay by creating a physical barrier against dental plaque, shortly after the teeth erupt.
- Discuss with a dentist the need to establish a preventive oral health regimen, include an evaluation of the bite and third molar development.

#### ***Nutrition***

- Eat health foods such as fruit, vegetables, grain products (especially whole grain), and dairy products (milk, cheese, cottage cheese, and unsweetened yogurt) for meals and snacks. Limit eating (grazing) in between.
- Eat foods containing sugar at mealtimes only (not between meals), and limit the amount. Frequent consumption of foods high in sugar, such as candy, cookies, cake, sweetened beverages (e.g., fruit drinks, soda), and fruit juice, increases the risk for tooth decay. In addition, frequent consumption of foods that easily adhere to the tooth surface, such as dried fruit, fruit-roll-ups, and candy, increases the risk for tooth decay. When checking for sugar, look beyond the sugar bowl and candy dish. A variety of foods contain one or more types of

sugar, and all types of sugars can promote tooth decay.

- Choose fruit rather than fruit juice. Drink water or milk between meals rather than fruit juice or sweetened beverages (e.g., fruit drinks, soda).
- If the school has vending machines, choose water or milk rather than fruit juice or sweetened beverages (e.g., fruit drinks, soda).
- Drink fluoridated water (via a community fluoridated water source) to prevent tooth decay; for families that prefer bottled water, drink a brand in which fluoride is added at a concentration of approximately 0.7 to 1.2 mg/L (ppm) is recommended.

### ***Injury Prevention***

Learning how to prevent oral injuries and handle oral emergencies, especially the loss or fracture of a tooth.

- *If a permanent tooth is knocked out*, you or an adult should (1) find the avulsed (lost) tooth, (2) hold it by the crown (top part) only, not the root, (3) rinse it under cold water gently if the root is dirty, but do not scrub, (4) reinsert it into the socket quickly, making sure that the front of the tooth is facing you, and (5) go to the dentist immediately. If it is not possible to replace the tooth, place the tooth in a container of cold milk or in a cold wet cloth and go to a dentist immediately.
- *If a tooth is fractured or chipped*, you or an adult should (1) rinse your mouth with water, (2) apply cold compresses to the cheek to reduce swelling, and (3) go to the dentist immediately.
- Wearing a safety belt while riding or driving in a vehicle. If you are driving, insisting that your passengers also wear safety belts.
- Wearing a helmet when riding a bicycle, all-terrain vehicle, or motorcycle.

Adolescents under age 16 should not ride an all-terrain vehicle or motorcycle.

- Wear protective gear when participating in physical activities or sports that could potentially result in injuries to the mouth, such as biking, skateboarding, in-line skating, or playing baseball, soccer, or lacrosse.
- Avoid oral piercings, which can damage teeth and gums.

### ***Substance Use***

Not smoking cigarettes or using spit tobacco.

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Source: “Bright Futures Oral Health Pocket Guide” by the National Maternal and Child Oral Health Resource Center  
<http://www.brightfutures.org/oralhealth/pdf/BFOHPocketGuide.pdf>