

Teen Years Tough on Teeth

Hormones, Other Factors to Blame for Wreaking Havoc on Oral Health

The preteen and teen years may prove some of the toughest for teeth. While every stage of life brings a new set of oral health issues, the mouth is often beset by unique combinations of internal and external factors such as hormones, social pressures, and lifestyle changes—often converging with harmful effects on teeth.

As kids become more independent, their diets, hygiene, and fashion choices—combined with physiological changes can result in damage to teeth and gums. Adolescents should be encouraged to keep up their good, lifelong oral health practices and be aware of certain relevant risk factors.

Hormonal changes Hormones released during puberty can cause increased blood circulation in the gums. The American Academy of Periodontology says that “during this time, the gums may become swollen, turn red, and feel tender.” Talk to your dentist if your teen experiences any of these symptoms. A dental professional can prescribe a treatment program that helps maintain healthy gums and teeth during periods of hormonal change.

Diet As teens spend more time with friends outside the watchful eyes of parents, they often acquire new diets that are abundant in sugary, starchy foods and sweetened drinks. To minimize the risk to teeth, teens should brush often in the course of a day and drink lots of fluoridated water.

Contact sports Oral injuries are often permanent, but many can be prevented by wearing a mouthguard while playing sports. Whether mouthguards are fitted by a dentist or purchased off-the-shelf, teens should keep them clean by rinsing the guards often and storing them in ventilated containers.



Eating disorders Eating disorders are very serious and can cause many health problems, including damage to the teeth and gums. Bulimia and anorexia can lead to inflammation of the gums, erosion of tooth enamel, cavities, and, potentially, can result in the loss of teeth. A dentist can usually treat the oral health problems but cannot treat an eating disorder. If you suspect that an adolescent has an eating disorder, seek medical help immediately.

Mouth piercing Jewelry in the lips or tongue can chip teeth, scrape gums, and cause other problems as well—including serious infections.

For most teenagers, remaining vigilant about oral hygiene should help them get through the teen years with their oral health intact. As always, it remains important to brush at least twice daily, floss once each day, and visit a dentist regularly for checkups.

Northeast Delta Dental

www.nedelta.com