

Revive Dental Care Information Sheet

All About Teenager's Teeth

Why is a healthy smile important?

An attractive and healthy smile is important when meeting people and making friends. And it can boost your confidence by making you feel good about yourself.

If you don't look after your teeth and gums properly you could suffer from a number of different conditions that will make you stand out from the crowd for all the wrong reasons:

- bad breath
- stained teeth
- tooth decay
- gum disease
- tooth loss
- dental erosion

You are what you eat guys!

Why is a healthy diet important for my oral health?

Every time you eat or drink anything sugary, your teeth are under acid attack for up to one hour. This is because the sugar will react with the bacteria in plaque and produce harmful acids. Plaque is a build-up of bacteria which forms on your teeth.

It is better to have three meals a day, and no more than two snacks.

What is dental erosion?

Dental erosion is the loss of tooth enamel caused by acid attacks. Enamel is the hard, protective coating of the tooth. If it is worn away, the dentine underneath is uncovered and your teeth can look discoloured and become sensitive.

Drink up

Acidic foods and drinks cause dental erosion.

Still water and milk are the best things to drink. Tea without sugar is also good for teeth as it contains fluoride.

Fruit juices are acidic, so only drink them at meal times. If you want to drink fruit juices between meals, try diluting them with water or drinking them through a straw.

Snack attacks

Avoid sugary snacks. If you need to eat between meals try these foods instead:

- plain popcorn
- nuts
- cheese
- breadsticks
- plain yoghurt

- rice cakes
- cheese scones
- unsweetened cereal
- crumpets
- plain bagels
- fresh soup
- raw vegetable pieces
- fresh fruit

The social scene

What effects will smoking, alcohol, sex and taking drugs have on my oral health?

Smoking

Smoking can cause tooth staining, gum disease, tooth loss and – more seriously – mouth cancer. Smoking is also one of the main causes of bad breath.

Alcohol

Alcoholic drinks can also cause mouth cancer. Smoking and drinking at the same time increases the risk even more.

Alcohol can also increase the risk of tooth decay and erosion.

Some alcoholic drinks have a lot of sugar in them, and some mixed drinks may contain acids. So they can cause decay or dental erosion if you drink them often and in large amounts.

Illegal drugs

Illegal drugs can lead to a range of health problems. Smoking cannabis can have the same effects as smoking tobacco.

Other drugs can cause a dry mouth, and increase the risk of erosion, decay, gum disease and bad breath.

Drugs can also cause you to grind your teeth, which can cause headaches and other problems.

Sex

The human papilloma virus (HPV) is the major cause of cervical cancer and affects the skin that lines the moist areas of the body (such as the mouth). It can be spread through oral sex.

Practicing safe sex and limiting the number of partners you have may help reduce your chances of contracting HPV.

You may hear about the option of having the HPV vaccine (this is offered to teenage girls) to help prevent the virus. Speak to your medical practice, parents or guardians about this if you would like more information.

Your dentist may ask you questions about your lifestyle choices and general health because this may affect the health of your mouth.

So, how do I look?

Some people are unhappy with how their teeth look, and feel self-conscious smiling in photos or in social situations. But you can have treatment to correct most problems. Discuss any issues you have with your dentist.

How can I improve my smile?

Braces straighten or move your teeth to improve their appearance and the way they work. They can also help to improve the long-term health of your teeth, gums and jaw joints by spreading the biting pressure over all the teeth.

There are many different braces and your dentist or orthodontist will be able to talk to you about what is best for you.

How long will I need to wear a brace?

It depends on how severe the problem is, and it may take anything from a few months to two and a half years. However, most people can be treated in one to two years.

What about tooth-whitening kits?

Home kits are cheaper than being treated by your dentist. But, because tooth whitening is a complicated process, we advise you always to talk to your dentist before using a kit.

Many kits sold in the UK do not contain enough of the whitening product to be effective. Some kits sold over the internet may contain mild acids and abrasives. Acids and abrasives can both attack your tooth enamel.

If you are considering using a home whitening kit, always look for the British or International Dental Health Foundation approved logo.

What is tooth jewellery?

Tooth jewellery involves sticking small jewels onto the teeth using dental cement. They should be fitted by a dentist, who can also easily remove them if necessary.

It is important to keep the area around the jewel clean, as plaque can easily build up around it and you will be more likely to get tooth decay.

What are the dangers of mouth piercing?

- Infection
- Possible swelling of the surrounding tissues
- Blood infections
- Swollen tongue
- Chipping and breaking of teeth
- Speech, eating and swallowing can be difficult
- Oral hygiene is difficult to keep up
- Dental treatment can be difficult

Can I protect my teeth when playing sports?

A mouthguard will help protect you against broken and damaged teeth and even a broken or dislocated jaw.

It is important to wear a professionally made mouthguard whenever you play any sport that involves contact or moving objects.

Ask your dentist about a mouthguard. It is a small price to pay for peace of mind.

Top tips for teenager's teeth

- Brush your teeth twice a day with toothpaste containing between 1350 and 1500 parts per million (ppm) of fluoride. Use a small to medium-sized brush with soft to medium bristles, and brush for two minutes morning and night
- Limit sugary and acidic food and drinks to meal times
- Visit your dentist regularly, as often as they recommend
- Clean in between your teeth every day with interdental brushes or floss to help remove plaque and food from between your teeth
- Use a mouthwash to help remove bacteria and freshen your breath
- Drink fizzy drinks through a straw, as this helps the liquid to go to the back of your mouth and reduces the acid attacks on your teeth
- Wait for at least one hour after eating or drinking anything before you brush your teeth
- Chew sugar-free gum after eating. This helps your mouth to make more saliva and this fights the acids that form in your mouth after eating