



Educate your adolescent to make healthy choices

From Childhood to Adulthood

Adolescence is a special transitional stage between childhood and adulthood. The World Health Organization (WHO) describes adolescents as people between the ages of 10-19 years old. Many changes occur during these momentous years:

- Puberty
- Growth spurts
- Biological changes
- Physical changes
- Mental growth and development in decision making

Adolescents not only learn more about their identity as they navigate the road of life, they also discover their niche in society. Mental maturity means the ability to make decisions independently from parents. While it is important that adults and parents allow space for growth, it is essential to provide a healthy environment for an adolescent to thrive.

Oral Care for Adolescents

Mixed dentition is present in the early stages of adolescents where both baby teeth and adult teeth are present in the mouth.

The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD) identifies adolescents as a group with:

- High risk for cavities
- Poor hygiene & poor nutritional habits
- Increased awareness in physical aesthetics
- Increased risk for trauma in the mouth and periodontal disease
- Dental phobia



A Healthy Lifestyle

Living a healthy lifestyle is an important life lesson that should be taught at a young age. As the adolescent enters adulthood, they may continue to apply life lessons such as making health conscious decisions with food selection and practicing good oral hygiene. Consult with your adolescent's healthcare provider before creating a dietary plan. A general healthy meal plan includes:

- Drinking plenty of water to stay hydrated
- Avoiding deep fried foods
- Eating fruits or vegetables for snacks instead of sugary foods like candy, chips, fruit juice, and soda
- Eating balanced meals- 3 times per day
- Avoiding extreme dieting

Several mobile apps are available to download that can help track food intake and support a nutritional diet plan.

Tooth brushing can become less of a priority as an adolescent explores individual values and responsibilities. Therefore, adolescents should be educated on the importance of maintaining good oral hygiene in order to prevent cavities, gingivitis, and tooth loss.

The following are recommendations to achieve a healthy adolescent mouth:

- Brush and Floss - brushing at least two minutes, twice a day, with a soft bristle toothbrush and flossing once a day removes plaque, food debris, and bad breath
- Fluoride Treatments - fluoride strengthens the enamel and protects it against cavity causing bacteria
 - Fluoride can be applied at the dental office, used as a rinse, through fluoridated toothpaste, or intake through treated water
- Regular Cleanings and Exams - regular cleaning visits help remove bacteria-filled tartar build-up that can't otherwise be removed with a toothbrush and helps reinforce protective dental enamel through professional fluoride treatment
 - Regular exams help identify and treat tooth decay early, before it becomes problematic and requires more extensive treatment (like root canals or extractions)
- Sealants - sealants are a thin plastic coating that protects areas of teeth that are hard to clean (like the molars) from getting cavities

Communicate with your adolescent's primary dentist if you observe:

- Sores in the mouth (lips, cheeks, or tongue)
- Bad breath
- Gingiva inflammation
- Infection/bubble on the gum
- Teeth grinding or Teeth erosion
- Eating disorder or poor eating habit
- TMD (Temporomandibular joint dysfunction)- jaw popping
- Loose tooth
- Sensitive teeth
- Toothache or pain with chewing
- Crooked or misaligned teeth (overbite/underbite)
- Low self-esteem due to undesired dental aesthetic

The world is a challenging place to navigate as a young adolescent entering their second decade of life. While we can't wrap our "little ones" in bubble wrap to protect them from heartache and tough life lessons, we can certainly provide them the tools, resources, support, and knowledge to set them up for success.



For more oral health information, please visit our website at www.bcbsfedental.com.



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