

## Testing the boundaries

Young adults may start smoking; may start drinking alcohol; may increase intake of caffeine by drinking coffee, tea, or energy drinks; or may try recreational drugs. All these habits can affect the mouth.

Oral problems linked with these habits include staining of teeth, reduced saliva, gum disease and oral cancer.

## Medicines

Some medicines can affect teeth and gums through high levels of ‘hidden sugars’ or by reducing saliva. Inhalers, particularly those containing steroids, can cause erosion of tooth enamel. Oral contraceptives (‘the pill’) can increase the likelihood that gum problems can develop.

### What to do

- Never change medicines without speaking with your doctor first. Ask your doctor about the sugar content of medicines or the affect on saliva. Sometimes another medicine can be substituted by your doctor.

## Strong acids can cause big problems

Any condition where vomiting or gastric reflux occurs frequently – such as bulimia, nausea from pregnancy or nausea from drinking/drugs – can cause rapid and severe erosion of tooth enamel.

### What to do

- After an episode of vomiting or after consuming acidic foods or drinks, the surface of the teeth may be ‘soft’ for a period of time. The teeth should NOT be brushed immediately. Instead, chew sugarless gum to stimulate the flow of saliva. Alternately, the mouth can be rinsed with a weak solution of freshly made baking soda (one teaspoon in a glass of water) to help neutralise the acid. Wait 30 minutes then brush with a fluoride toothpaste.
- If any condition is causing vomiting on a regular basis, of course, you should consult a doctor. As well, a dental professional should be consulted to advise and assist with measures that will prevent severe damage to the teeth.

## Sporting interests

Some habits related to playing sport can affect the teeth. Dehydration from sporting activities can reduce the amount of saliva you produce. If athletes regularly drink sugary or acidic drinks to replace fluids, the risk of tooth decay is increased. Many sports drinks are acidic and can erode the enamel on teeth. Energy drinks can be high in caffeine which can affect dental health by changing the way the body handles water and saliva.

Some sports can put players at risk of having a tooth damaged or knocked out. Such damage can have life long consequences.

### What to do

- Drink plenty of WATER before, during and after playing sports. Consume sports drinks or energy drinks in moderation
- Professionally made mouthguards are highly recommended for athletes who play contact sports.

Mouthguards should be worn during training as well as during games.

## Orthodontics (braces)

The teen years are a common time for orthodontic treatment. It can be more difficult to keep teeth and gums healthy with all the wires and brackets needed to move the teeth. The Colgate Oral Care brochure ‘Oral Care During Orthodontic Treatment’ gives details of how to care for your teeth and gums during orthodontic treatment.



## Tongue and lip piercing

There are risks of infection with any body piercing procedures. Individuals should ensure that instruments to be used have been properly sterilised beforehand to avoid the risk of hepatitis B and C, tetanus or HIV. Barbells in the tongue can chip or break teeth. Gums can also be damaged if a piercing rubs against the gum. This is of particular concern with lip (la bret) piercings.



Photo courtesy of Dr Jamie Lucas, Melbourne

### What to do

- Watch the size and position of barbells in the tongue so teeth will not be damaged
- Watch the position of la bret piercings to ensure they do not rub against the gum
- Never sleep with piercings in.

## Tooth whitening

There is increasing interest in tooth whitening and many whitening products are available. Some products work by removing the stains that build up on the outside of teeth from smoking or drinking tea, coffee or red wine. This is the kind of stain that most whitening toothpastes remove. Care needs to be taken in selecting a whitening toothpaste that the ingredients used to remove the stains are not too abrasive.



Other whitening products contain peroxide and lighten the colour of the tooth itself. New whitening products are becoming available in pharmacies and super-markets. For best results, consult a dental professional. Some dental professionals also use lasers for whitening teeth.



Temporary sensitivity is common during or after tooth whitening procedures. There are a number of products available from pharmacies and dental surgeries to help reduce sensitivity.

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When using the oral care products found in this brochure: Always read the label • Use only as directed • See your health care professional if symptoms persist  
TMs “Colgate Total”, “Colgate 360°”, “Colgate Actibrush”, “Neutrafluor”, “Plax”, “Visible White”, “Simply White” and “Colgate Sensitive” Reg

# Patient Information: Oral Health for Teens and 20’s



Changing lifestyles  
and oral health

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The teenage years and early twenties are exciting times of many changes – starting high school, first jobs, many new relationships, finishing high school, technical training, university, moving out of home, starting careers, engagements, weddings and young families. These are years of exploring new interests and testing boundaries. These changes and challenges can affect conditions in the mouth and can form habits that have long term effects on oral health.

## More tooth decay!

Studies have shown that young adults (18-24 year olds) in Australia have more tooth decay compared to Australian children at 12 years of age. Similarly in New Zealand oral health gains made during school years are not continued into adulthood. It is thought that the many changes in the lives of young adults may result in less frequent tooth brushing, new eating patterns and less regular dental check-ups – changes that can increase the risk of tooth decay.

### what to do – remember the basics!

- Fluoride is needed DAILY throughout life to protect teeth against decay
- Fluoride is most easily applied DAILY through brushing with fluoride toothpaste and drinking fluoridated water
- Brushing twice a day with fluoride toothpaste reduces the risk of tooth decay much more than brushing only once a day
- The most important time to apply some fluoride is before bedtime as the flow of saliva (which protects teeth against decay) is lowest during sleep

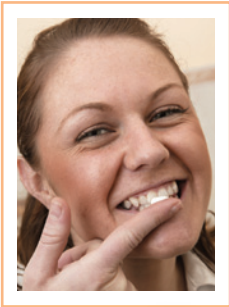


- Use floss to remove plaque between teeth
- Have regular dental check-ups
- Don't share toothbrushes – bacteria that cause tooth decay can be spread from person to person!

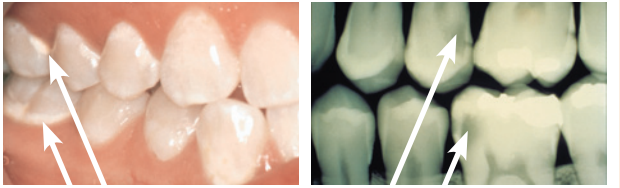


### More tips

On occasions when a second daily brushing is not possible, fluoride can be applied simply by placing some fluoride toothpaste on a finger and smearing the paste on the teeth. Fluoride mouthrinses can also be a source of additional fluoride application.



Look in your mouth regularly for early signs of tooth decay and other problems. Gently lift your upper lip and look for white spots near the gumline. If you see white spots (or dark spots) near the gumline, seek advice from a dental professional. Keep in mind that signs of tooth decay are not always visible. Often tooth decay starts between teeth. Dental professionals have the equipment and training necessary to thoroughly examine your mouth for decay and other problems. So visit your dental professional for regular check-ups.



White spots near gumline may indicate early decay      Xrays may be needed to see decay between teeth  
*(Photo courtesy of Prof John McIntyre, University of Adelaide)*

## Changing diets & eating patterns

Some young adults become very conscious of good diet. Others start substituting fast foods for regular nutritious meals. 'Eating on the go' and frequent snacking can become common. Teeth can be affected by these eating patterns as well as by the types of foods and drinks that are consumed.

Acidic foods and drinks can 'erode' enamel from teeth if consumed too frequently or sipped over a long period of time and held in the mouth. Acidic drinks include soft drinks (diet and regular), wine, cordials, fruit juices, fruit drinks and sports drinks. Acidity can also be a problem with some foods that are considered 'healthy', such as citrus fruits or salad dressings made of vinegar, if such foods are consumed too frequently. The chart below shows the acidity of some common drinks and foods.

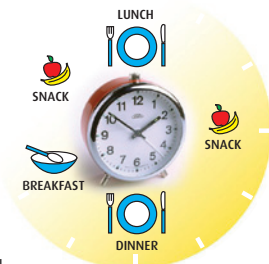
### Acidity of some common foods and drinks

Acid Foods & Drinks (pH less than 4.5)	Low acid foods & drinks (pH > 4.5)
Apples, apricots, cherries, oranges, peaches, pears, plums, pineapples, raspberries	Bananas, mangoes, melons, pawpaws
Tomatoes	Soups, pasta
Soft drinks (regular & diet), cordial, sports drinks, wine, fruit drinks, fruit juices	Milk, soda water, flat spring water, dairy foods
Pickled vegetables	Vegetables
Salad dressings	Meat, poultry, seafood
Lemons	Eggs, soda crackers

### What to do

- Saliva is the body's natural defence against tooth decay – constantly washing away acids and replenishing minerals in teeth. Give saliva time to work by limiting the number of times you eat each

day. A good general rule is to limit eating times to 5 each day – 3 meals + 2 snacks



- 'Tooth friendly' snack choices such as nuts, unsalted popcorn, cheese, fruits and vegetables are to be encouraged over less healthy snacks of the sugary, sticky type, such as lollies or muesli bars. Keep healthy snack choices ready and visible to 'grab on the go'
- You do not need to eliminate ALL the foods and drinks that can have a bad effect on teeth. If tooth decay or erosion of enamel is a problem for you, even small changes that substitute some more 'tooth friendly' choices each day can help



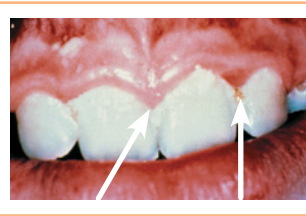
- Drinking lots of water can be a healthy, practical and money saving alternative to sugary or acidic drinks. Be aware that not all bottled water has fluoride in it. Drinking bottled water exclusively may not give you the daily fluoride protection you need.

## Gum problems

Early signs of gum disease – bleeding gums when brushing or red and puffy gums – may arise if daily tooth brushing routines slip. Changing hormones, such as during puberty or pregnancy, can increase the likelihood that gum problems can develop.

### What to do

- Early signs of gum disease can be reversed with more attention to brushing and flossing. This does NOT mean brushing harder (scrubbing) or using a harder toothbrush. Scrubbing and hard brushes can damage teeth. You can reverse the early signs of gum disease by brushing gently with a SOFT brush and by flossing – give special attention to the areas that look red and puffy or bleed
- Persistent swelling or bleeding despite regular cleaning are signs that something is not right and that the advice of a dental professional is needed.



Heavy plaque      Bleeding gums

## Bad breath

Bad breath can have many causes such as smoking, gum disease, foods and drinks, or gastric reflux.

### What to do

- Thorough daily cleaning, including brushing the tongue, is the best defence against bad breath. Choose a brush such as Colgate 360°® with a tongue cleaner on the reverse side. Do not use sugary mints or sugary gum to freshen your breath as these can cause tooth decay if used frequently. On occasions when you do not have time to brush, use sugarless gum or mouthrinse. If bad breath persists, a dental professional can help you identify the cause and find solutions. Rinses and gum are not substitutes for daily brushing and flossing!