



FACT SHEET: TEEN & YOUNG ADULT ORAL HEALTH

Teens lead busy lives, juggling school, sports, activities, friends, family — they understandably make hasty decisions that directly impact their well-being, especially when it comes to what they choose to eat and drink.

Oral Health America's *Campaign for Teen & Young Adult Oral Health* strives to equip teens with the tools they need to make better decisions and ultimately have improved oral and overall health outcomes.

Why Do Teens Need to Worry About Oral Health?

- When teens enter high school, they tend to have healthy lifestyles. By graduation, many will have picked up enough bad habits to be at a **significantly higher risk for chronic diseases**.¹
- Common teen beverage choices like sports drinks, coffee, diet sodas or regular sodas, **may increase the chances for tooth decay and obesity**.²
- Sometimes, teens or young adults may substitute their meals with such drinks, which ultimately has a negative impact on both their nutritional intake and oral health.
- **Healthy habits are easiest to form early**, meaning that the choices teens make today have lifelong implications for their health.

What Happens to Teeth When We Make Poor Beverage Choices?

Changes in a mouth start the minute one eats or drinks something. Acid and sugar can wear down the enamel on a tooth, causing cavities to form or erosion to occur. When enamel is worn away, the dentine is exposed, which can cause pain and sensitivity and raises the risk of decay.^{2,3}

How Do We Protect Against Erosion & Decay?^{2 3 4}

- Drink plenty of water
- Limit sugar-containing drinks
- Dilute sports drinks / juices with water
- Don't hold / swish drinks in your mouth
- Rinse your mouth with water after drinking sugared or acidic beverages
- Chill your drinks, as warmer temperatures speed erosion
- Use a straw to reduce tooth contact
- Brush and clean your teeth for two minutes twice a day
- Use a fluoride toothpaste
- Floss daily
- Chew sugarless gum
- Visit your dentist regularly

How Do We Encourage Healthy Habits in Teens?

- **Choose healthy beverages.** Options like soda, energy drinks and juice are high in calories but low in nutrients, leading to weight gain, while the high acid and sugar may cause tooth decay.² An alternative option is a glass of milk, which supplies a generous dose of calcium that helps build critical bone mass and healthy teeth.⁵
- **Drink water.** Water can offset the effects of sweetened beverages by diluting the acids in the mouth and protecting teeth from cavities.
- **For teen athletes, dilute or pair energy drinks with water.** Athletes should drink beverages like Gatorade in combination with water after prolonged, vigorous activity when they need to quickly replenish electrolytes. If they get thirsty before, during or after practice, it is recommended that they drink water.⁶

HOW CAN YOU MAKE AN IMPACT?

Support Oral Health America as we raise raising awareness about what teens can do to make healthy choices to maintain good oral health. Join us as we strive to impact the lives of America's young adult population. Together, we can make a difference.

Visit oralhealthamerica.org/teens for more information and teach teens ways to make better choices that improve their oral health today.

¹ Teens pick up numerous unhealthy habits in high school. The Record. <http://www.therecord.com/news-story/3846693-teens-pick-up-numerous-unhealthy-habits-in-high-school/>

² "The Truth About Sugar Drinks and Your Smile." American Dental Association. MouthHealthy.org

³ "Sip All Day, Get Decay." Wisconsin Dental Association. www.wda.org/your-oral=health/sip-all-day

⁴ "4 Reasons Water is the Best Beverage for Your Teeth." American Dental Association. MouthHealthy.org

⁵ "Healthy Soda Alternatives for Teens." SFGate. <http://healthyeating.sfgate.com/healthy-soda-alternatives-teens-2745.html>

⁶ "Are Sports Drinks Better Than Energy Drinks for Kids?" ABCNews. <http://abcnews.go.com/Health/sports-drinks-choice-kids/story?id=13704953>