

Hormonal fluctuations affect gums and teeth.¹

Adolescence centers around one word: hormones. These microscopic agents of change provoke growth spurts, puberty onset and increased self-awareness. But did you also know that hormones can affect your teen or pre-teen's oral health?

Adolescents are at greater risk for periodontal (gum) disease.¹

During puberty, higher levels of progesterone and estrogen drive more blood to circulate through the gums. This delicate imbalance makes gums more sensitive to irritants such as food particles and plaque, and they may swell, turn red and feel tender. Some girls may experience a temporary form of "menstruation gingivitis" (swollen or bleeding gums) in the days before the onset of each period. And, certain medications, health conditions or even brushing too aggressively can put teens at greater risk for getting periodontal (gum) disease.

Emotional changes may contribute to poor motivation to practice oral hygiene.

Oily skin, acne, sweat and body odor can all combine to defeat an adolescent's motivation to take good care of teeth and gums (or tell parents about potential dental problems). Left untreated, however, tooth decay, injured gums, exposed tooth roots, cracked teeth, worn enamel or loose fillings can cause hypersensitivity to pressure / changes in temperature, or lead to more serious problems.² Stressful situations may cause your adolescent to grind or clench his teeth ("bruxism"), causing cracks or fractures in teeth, increased risk of periodontal disease, or problems with the joints connecting the jawbone to the skull.²

A child's oral health needs can change significantly upon entering adolescence.

Work with your dentist. After all, a healthy smile, good breath and strong teeth all contribute to your adolescent's self-esteem, sense of well-being and confidence..



A parent's guide to promoting your adolescent's oral health

- **Teach your child good oral health habits prior to adolescence.** Children with good oral hygiene habits prior to adolescence tend to continue taking care of teeth and gums into adolescence. If not, work with your child. It's much easier to change a child's habits than it is an adult's.
- **Serve as a good role model.** Practice good oral health habits yourself; your child will likely mimic your behaviors.
- **Schedule regular dental visits.** Maintain a routine schedule of family check-ups, periodontal evaluations and cleanings before and throughout your child's adolescence.
- **Watch for signs of potential problems.** If your child begins to smile less frequently, has frequent bad breath, or complains of mouth pain, bleeding or discomfort while brushing or eating, call your dentist.

Encourage your teenager to practice good oral hygiene habits at home, and to visit the dentist regularly.

it's time to feel better



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