

# Oral Health *Infant to Teen*

*No matter their age, good oral care keeps children and teens healthy beyond their dental needs. Brushing, flossing, and regular dental checkups are the cornerstones of a healthy smile.*



The best place to begin is at the beginning. Teaching children good oral hygiene at an early age leads to good habits as teens and lifelong oral health.

When your baby's teeth begin to come in, wipe the gums with a clean, moist washcloth and graduate to brushing with a child-size toothbrush. The first dental visit should take place within six months after that first tooth appears, and no later than a child's first birthday.

Here are few oral care tips to help you through the early months:

- Don't put a baby to bed with a bottle, or use a bottle as a pacifier—both can lead to tooth decay.

- Thumb sucking after permanent teeth come in can cause problems with bite and tooth alignment later.
- Infants and toddlers who don't get proper amounts of fluoride may be at risk for tooth decay. (Download our fluoride Fact Sheet from the Dental Health Center ([uccitdp.com](http://uccitdp.com)) for details.) Your child's dentist will know if more fluoride is needed.

You can help protect children's smiles through sealants, a plastic coating that guards against cavities.

Managing a teen's oral health can be a bit more challenging because of their snacking choices, sports and busier lifestyles.

## *Food Choices for Teens*

Encourage your teen to carry a travel-sized toothbrush, chew sugar-free gum, drink plenty of water, and snack on healthy foods.

If your teen is active in sports consider having him or her wear a mouth guard to protect against injury.

Common oral health concerns for older children and teens include:

- **Malocclusion:** Crowded or crooked teeth and jaw misalignment becomes most noticeable between the ages of 6 and 12.

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- **Braces:** This common orthodontic treatment not only straightens teeth, but can also correct the bite—making it easier to eat, speak, and keep teeth and gums clean.
- **Wisdom teeth:** These typically come in during the late teens. They may need to be removed so they don't crowd teeth, cause pain or become infected.

Your dentist will help keep your teen on the right path, so help your teen keep his or her dental appointments. Your dentist knows just what to watch for at every age. 🦷

FYI: More information can be found at the TRICARE Dental Program's (TDP) Dental Health Center ([uccitdp.com](http://uccitdp.com)); the Academy of General Dentistry ([agd.org](http://agd.org)) and the American Dental Association ([ada.org](http://ada.org)).

## Did you know?

- **At every age,** encourage a good diet for your child that's rich in calcium, fruits and vegetables. Vitamins from these foods help incoming teeth, growing bones and healthy bodies.
- **Toss the sugary snacks:** They're bad for the teeth and contribute to childhood obesity and diabetes.
- **See your dentist:** Make sure your child visits the dentist regularly. Ask if your child is receiving the proper amount of fluoride to help prevent tooth decay.
- **Follow up:** Help your child with brushing and flossing until age 12. Your kids might be grumpy about it, but this ensures a clean mouth and models good oral health habits.



Source: American Dental Association ([ada.org](http://ada.org))

## Fact sheets in United Concordia's oral health series:



• Fluoride & Your Oral Health



• Oral Health: Infant to Teen



• Oral Health & Your Overall Wellness



• Oral Health for Kids with Special Needs



• Preventive Oral Care for Everyone



• Your Oral Health & Diabetes



• Your Oral Health & Heart Disease



• Your Oral Health & Lupus



• Your Oral Health & Oral Cancer



• Your Oral Health & Organ Transplants



• Your Oral Health & Rheumatoid Arthritis



• Your Oral Health & Pregnancy

Download fact sheets from the TRICARE Dental Program (TDP) Dental Health Center: [uccitdp.com](http://uccitdp.com)