Teens: Watch your mouth!

We’ll do whatever it takes and then some.

Many teenagers don’t get the proper education to make smart decisions about their oral hygiene habits – and neglecting teeth can have a lasting negative impact on both oral and overall health. Learn to help keep teens’ smiles healthy and bright.

Fight tooth decay!

Dental decay is the most common chronic disease in young people between the ages of 5 and 17, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

But for many teens, decay may be preventable by practicing proper oral hygiene techniques.

Talk to teens about the importance of oral health: Help keep their smiles healthy for a lifetime.

- **Limit sugar intake.** Sugar in sweetened snacks and drinks can cause cavities, which may erode and damage tooth enamel – particularly when sugar remains in the mouth.

- **Play it safe.** Contact sports can cause oral injuries, but teens may prevent damage to teeth by wearing a mouth guard on the field or court. Whether the guard is custom-fitted by a dentist or bought at a store, your teen may help reduce bacteria growth by rinsing the guard frequently and storing it in a ventilated container.

- **Avoid oral piercings.** Tongue piercings can be dangerous: Oral jewelry may chip teeth while teens eat, sleep or speak, requiring a filling, root canal or even extraction. Oral piercings may also lead to oral infections, difficulty breathing and risk of hepatitis from unclean piercing instruments.

- **Choose healthy snacks.** Between school, extracurricular activities and part-time jobs, many teens are too busy to sit down for full, balanced meals. Help your teen make healthy choices by providing nutritious, tooth-friendly, on-the-go snacks like apples, carrot sticks and low-fat cheese.

- **Learn quick tricks.** Teach your teen a few small dental hygiene tips that may have far-reaching results on oral health:
  - Keep a travel-size toothbrush in a locker, backpack or gym bag to make it easy to brush after meals and snacks.
  - There’s no substitute for brushing and flossing regularly, but even rinsing the mouth with water after consuming sugary treats may help reduce the risk of cavities.
  - Chewing sugarless gum with xylitol (a natural sweetener) after meals or snacks can help cleanse the mouth and may help prevent cavities.
  - Drinking water throughout the day can help cleanse teeth of excess bacteria and food debris.

Visit the dentist. Help your teen understand that twice-yearly dental visits and cleanings are vital to maintaining oral health and catching any minor problems before they become larger. An added bonus: Bright, healthy, shiny teeth are always in fashion!

Information courtesy of the Academy of General Dentistry
Feel free to read through our wellness program and check out our resources.