

## Common Oral Health Problems in Adolescents

Adolescents face many oral health problems which may require them to visit a dentist or any other healthcare professional. Irregular teeth growth is a common problem and adolescents with braces are a common sight. Another problem is wisdom teeth extraction or the removal of the third molar. Dental cavities are yet another common problem in adolescents.

Orthodontics is a specialty in dentistry which deals with correction, development and prevention of irregular teeth, jaw and bite. Orthodontics also helps to correct jaw disorders and facial abnormalities. If a general dentist feels abnormalities in the adolescent, he/she will refer the patient to an orthodontist. The American Dental Association suggests that every adolescent above the age of seven should get an orthodontic evaluation done. Problems which require orthodontic treatment are crowded or crooked teeth, extra teeth, missing teeth, under-bite, overbite, jaw joint disorder, and incorrect or misaligned jaw position.

To get braces or any other orthodontic treatments, the appropriate age is ten to fourteen years. But regardless of the age, the same physical and biological process is used in correcting and moving the teeth alignments. Braces are also known as fixed orthodontic appliances. There are three types of braces used to move and reposition the teeth. The first consists of brackets which are made out of plastic or metal. They are either of tooth color or clear and are bonded onto the teeth. The second type is the lingual type of brackets which are attached to the back teeth and cannot be seen while talking. The third type is a band. It is a metal band which covers the teeth and wraps around the last ones.

When adolescents wear braces they have to take certain precautions in order to avoid any more oral health complications. The most important precautionary measure is to brush the teeth regularly after every meal. Since the food can be easily lodged in braces, it is a good idea to brush carefully with soft bristles toothbrush and fluoride toothpaste. In the morning, the adolescent must floss between the braces and teeth. Food stuffs which are sticky or hard must be avoided as they are very difficult to remove. Foods like caramel, chew candy, popcorn, and nuts must be avoided. Cleaning must be done by the orthodontist or general dentist, every five to six months.

The wisdom teeth or third molars can grow in people of the age fifteen to twenty five. These teeth cause problem, because most of the mouths are too small to adjust new teeth and hence they need to be removed. If the wisdom tooth has place to grow, without affecting other teeth, they can be left to themselves. But if the adolescent experiences pain, facial swelling, mouth infection and

gum-line swelling, then they should be extracted immediately. They can also destroy the second molars and impact other tooth. Various gum and jaw diseases can be caused. There can be a tumor development; cysts development and plaque build up. Hence, a surgery is performed to remove the tooth or teeth. The gum tissue covering the wisdom tooth is removed and the connective tissue connecting the tooth to the bone is detached. The tooth is then removed and the opening is sutured. A general dentist can perform wisdom tooth surgery in the local office using anesthesia.

Five times common than asthma is tooth cavities. The tooth above the gum line is made up of enamel, the hardest tissue within the human body. The tooth below the gum-line comprise of nerves, roots and dentin. Dentin is another type of tissue and isn't as hard as the enamel. The acid which leads to tooth decay is produced by bacteria. These acids, along with dietary sugar, attach the enamel and eat away the minerals within the enamel, until a cavity is formed. This is known as tooth cavity. The biggest prevention against dental cavities is brushing teeth twice a day and even better, after every meal with fluoride toothpaste and soft bristle toothbrush. Carbonated drinks must be avoided strictly and must be replaced with fruit juices and sugary food must be avoided. Intake of fluoridated water also helps a lot or fluoride supplements can be used as replacement.

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