



The Life Stages of Oral Health

Your oral health changes throughout your entire life. From birth to the later years of life, there are special concerns you should know about related to your oral health.

In this video series, kids will learn all about the different life stages of oral health and why it's important to take care of their smiles at every age in life.

Here is some good background information related to each life stage to think about as you watch each video in the series:

Baby Basics

- Even though a baby's first tooth won't show up until sometime around 6 months of age, his or her gums still need to be wiped with a soft, clean cloth after each feeding to get rid of unwanted bacteria. Once the first tooth comes in, using a small, soft-bristled toothbrush will keep a baby's teeth and gums healthy. When two teeth touch, it's time to start flossing.
- Young children often swallow most of the toothpaste put on their brush, so it's important to use the correct amount. If a baby is under 3 years old, a small, rice grain-size amount of toothpaste will do. For children 3–6 years old, a pea-sized amount of toothpaste is best.

Ages 4 – 12

- By this time, kids can start to do a pretty good job of brushing their teeth. Caregivers should still keep an eye on kids' oral health routines up until this point to make sure they're brushing at least two minutes twice a day. By the time kids are around 8, they probably won't need brushing supervision at all, though they'll likely still need help flossing daily until age 10.

Teens

- Gum with sugar promotes tooth decay by essentially bathing teeth in sugar water multiple times each day. Just the opposite is true for sugarless varieties. Chewing sugar-free gum can help wash away food particles and harmful acids by stimulating saliva flow by up to 10 times the normal amount. Chewing gum containing xylitol can also be helpful when it comes to battling harmful acids and bacteria in the mouth.
- Kids should wear a mouthguard for almost any sport, especially if there's potential for contact with surfaces, other players, or equipment. Mouthguards should be worn for baseball, field hockey, football, ice hockey, lacrosse, martial arts, soccer, softball, wrestling, water polo, and rugby. Mouthguards are also recommended for skateboarding and bicycling.

Young Adults

- Many people neglect regular dental visits during this phase of life. In fact, a third of American adults don't visit the dentist yearly. Continuing with regular dental appointments is essential to good oral health.

For more dental health educational resources, go to www.healthysmilelearning.org. Healthy Smile Learning is an outreach effort of Arizona PBS on behalf of the Delta Dental Institute.

- Adults can keep stress levels down with healthy eating, deep breathing, and plenty of sleep and exercise. Stress induces the hormone cortisol, which harms teeth and gums—and can contribute to gum disease. High-stress levels can also lead to canker sores, burning mouth syndrome, and cold sores.

Mid-Life

- Second only to kids, women ages 51 and older need the most calcium
- Oral cancer is another medical risk that becomes more common as people age. The number of people suffering from the disease increases after the age of 35 and half of all cases occurs in people older than age 68. Oral cancer affects twice as many men as women

Ages 65+

- Regular checkups and cleanings are important at any age
- Smoking can put adults at high risk for oral cancer and gum disease.