

Watch your mouth!

- Braces
- Wisdom Teeth
- Tooth Whitening
- Bad Breath

During your teen years, you're putting together a smile that should last you a lifetime.

Straight talk about braces

You or some of your friends already may be wearing braces. Braces or other orthodontic appliances can help straighten your teeth and correct jaw alignment. But do you know about all these benefits?

Crooked and crowded teeth are hard to take care of and clean, which may lead to tooth decay, gum disease, and possibly tooth loss. Bad bites can also cause difficulty in speaking and chewing; cause abnormal wear on tooth surfaces; and lead to problems with bones, jaw joints, and gum tissue. Correcting these problems can make your mouth healthier and give you a great smile!

Wisdom Teeth-Last in, First out (sometimes)

Wisdom teeth, or third molars, are the last permanent teeth to take their place in your mouth, sometime during your late teens or early 20's.

If they come in properly, wisdom teeth can be an asset, but many times, there isn't room for wisdom teeth in the jaw. When this happens, the teeth become impacted—they can't fully emerge from the gum tissue.

Impacted teeth can damage adjacent teeth. Partially erupted wisdom teeth are difficult to clean and provide an opening for bacteria to settle beneath the gum line, where they can cause an infection. Your dentist can check these teeth in you late teens and let you know if they need to come out.

Don't Take Tooth Whitening Lightly

You've probably seen a lot of advertising for whitening toothpastes, and several of them have received the ADA Seal of Acceptance. Whitening toothpastes with the ADA Seal contain polishing or chemical agents to improve tooth appearance by removing surface stains through gentle polishing or chemical action. Whitening toothpastes should not be expected to provide the same level of whitening as bleaching product. At-home bleaching kits seem to be turning up everywhere. But beware of these over-the-counter products— tooth bleaching is not a do-it-yourself job.

Some ingredients in these kits---such as hydrogen peroxide, carbamide peroxide or acids—are strong solutions and can irritate your gums and other oral soft tissues. Some

people also have other reactions to bleaching products, like tooth sensitivity. And in some cases, the bleaching will not help improve tooth color.

If you want to make those pearly whites whiter, talk to your dentist first. He or she can tell you if you're a good candidate for tooth whitening. If you are, your dentist can perform the procedure in the office or send you home with a special tray that will limit contact between your gums and the whitener solution. Your dentist also can monitor your oral health during the procedure to help prevent or limit any adverse effects.

Don't Get Down In the Mouth over Bad Breath

A lot of things can cause bad breath—certain foods, poor oral hygiene, gum disease, a dry mouth, use of tobacco products, or a medical disorder. We've all had it at one time or another, so it's nothing to lose that smile over. In many cases, simple changes in personal oral hygiene habits can freshen you right up.

Bacteria usually are the culprits behind bad breath, or halitosis. Good oral hygiene---brushing twice a day and flossing daily—as well as regular visits to your dentist often can help fight off bad breath. Brush your tongue, too, to remove any bacteria that may be coating the surface.

If you are keeping you with your oral hygiene and you still feel that bad breath is a problem, talk to your dentist. Your dentist may be able to track down and help eliminate the cause.

Tending to Teeth in the Teen Years

You know the basic steps to good oral health:

- Brush twice a day with a toothpaste containing fluoride;
- Clean between your teeth daily with dental floss or another inter dental cleaner;
- Limit snacks and eat nutritious, well-balanced meals; and
- Visit your dentist regularly.

But now that you have most of your permanent teeth, you'll need to know more than just the basics. During your teen years, you're putting together a smile that should last you a lifetime.