



Small Bites



Do keep an eye out to make sure your teen is maintaining good oral health habits.



Do buy sugar-free gum if your teen chews gum.



Do keep healthy snacks on hand for hungry teens.



Don't stock up on sodas and sports drinks for your teen.



Don't let your teen play contact sports without a mouthguard.



Don't approve a tongue or lip piercing.

At 13, Kylie's got a pretty good grip on the oral health basics. She knows she should continue to **brush twice a day and floss once daily**. Still, teenagers' oral health comes with a whole new set of concerns that Kylie and her parents haven't had to contend with before - like many other teenage experiences.

Parents Still Play a Part

Kylie may not know it, but her parents still try to keep tabs on how often she's brushing and flossing so they can remind her if she gets a little neglectful. ("Mooooom!") Prior to getting braces, she chewed a lot of gum, so keeping her sugar-free gum supply well stocked was a must. Gum containing 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.

Guard Up

As a basketball player, Kylie wears a mouthguard during games and practices. In fact, she 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.

In addition to keeping teeth safe, mouthguards can also minimize lacerated and bruised lips and cheeks by keeping these soft tissues away from the teeth. There are a few mouthguard options available, but Kylie's dentist was able to recommend the best type of mouthguard to accommodate her braces.

To keep her mouthguard clean and functional, Kylie stores it in a well-ventilated plastic container, rinses it after each use and occasionally cleans it with soap and water or mouthwash.

Stock the Fridge With Healthy Food

The average teen eats nine times a day and Kylie is no exception. Opening the fridge or pantry that much could easily turn into a junk food fest. That's why her parents **have healthy snacks like fruits, vegetables and cheese readily available.**

Kylie's parents have cut back on buying soda and sports drinks. While it's not good to indulge in these drinks at any age, teenagers' teeth are especially susceptible to these sugary, acidic drinks because their tooth enamel is still immature and porous.

Brace Yourself

Kylie started going to the orthodontist at the recommended age of 7. Since then, the orthodontist has been keeping an eye on the development of her teeth and jaws. When she discovered that Kylie's teeth weren't aligning correctly, the orthodontist recommended braces. **Orthodontics such as this are usually applied between the ages of 8 and 14** and are typically worn for one to three years.

After two years, Kylie will likely get her braces removed. She doesn't think they are too bad, but has to be careful to avoid foods like caramel, gum, pretzels, popcorn and ice. Even when eating healthy foods like apples and carrots, she has to be aware of how she bites down on them.

Signs that your child may need braces include:

- Early or late loss of baby teeth
- Trouble chewing or biting
- Thumb or finger sucking
- Crowded teeth
- Biting cheeks or roof of mouth
- Teeth that meet badly or not at all

Just Say No to Piercings

Kylie thinks she wants a lip piercing in the future, but her parents aren't crazy about the idea. Her dentist isn't, either. Oral jewelry such as tongue and lip piercings can cause chipped or even fractured teeth, infections, allergic reactions, swollen tissue and swelling of the tongue. They can even be choking hazards. If Kylie does end up getting one, she'll need to be very careful about caring for it. The piercing should be cleaned with antiseptic mouthwash after every meal. The jewelry should be brushed just as teeth are and removed while she's sleeping, eating or participating in strenuous activity.

The teenage years are definitely busy years, but with a little extra care and some gentle reminders, Kylie's oral health will be in great shape for her college years and beyond.