



Poor Oral Health Can Hurt Grades

When your teen isn't feeling well, it can be hard for them to do their best in school. Poor oral health can have the same effect. One main reason is that poor oral health often causes pain, whether it's an aching tooth or sore gums. And focusing on schoolwork (or anything!) can be next to impossible if you are in pain.

The effects of tooth decay

In addition to interfering with concentration, poor oral health can affect your teen's ability to learn in other ways:

- Oral health problems can reduce appetite or make eating difficult. Not eating enough or eating a limited diet can result in poor nutrition. Poor nutrition can affect a teen's ability to concentrate and perform complex tasks.
- Dental pain can cause anxiety, fatigue, irritability, and withdrawal. All of these can affect a teen's ability to learn.
- Teens with visible dental decay, swollen and bleeding gums, or broken or cracked teeth tend to have lower self-esteem. This can make it hard to make friends, which is an important part of the school years.

Although this may not seem like a big or common problem, it is. According to 2015 data, 57 percent of teens ages 12 – 19 have experienced dental decay in their permanent teeth and 17 percent had untreated cavities. Those with poor oral health are nearly 3 times as likely as their classmates to miss school as a result of dental pain. These absences result in poorer school performance.

Getting dental care at school

The following are details about getting preventive dental services at school:

- Services can take place during the normal school day.
- Several dental providers are now able to bring hygienists, dental assistants, and even dentists to your teen's school to provide your teen with education on the importance of taking care of their teeth.
- Some dental providers may also be able to provide a dental exam, cleaning, and apply fluoride varnish at the school.

Sources: National Maternal & Child Oral Health Resource Center, Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) Oral Health Program, and National Center for Biotechnology Information

Oral health tips

- **Help your teen get the most out of school:** Make sure your teen brushes their teeth twice a day for 2 minutes and flosses at least once a day.
- **Avoid sugary snacks and snacking between meals.**
- **Choose water over soda pop.**
- **Make sure your teen sees a dentist regularly!** Regular visits can help prevent problems, and your dentist can recommend the best course of action if problems do develop. If you need help finding a dentist, call PrimeWest Health Member Services at **1-866-431-0801** or **TTY 1-800-627-3529** or **711**. The call is free.



1-866-431-0801 (toll free); TTY 1-800-627-3529 or 711

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