



## ALL ABOUT...

# SMILES

THERE'S SOMETHING MISSING FROM YOUR FAMILY PHOTOS—NAMELY, YOUR PEARLY WHITES. HERE'S HOW TO GET YOUR GRIN BACK IN THE FRAME.

By Barbara Brody  
Photography by Felix Wong

### YOUR BIGGEST DENTAL PROBLEMS, SOLVED

**"I had braces (and scrunch socks and a bad perm) back in the '80s. My teeth were straight once but aren't anymore. Am I too old to get braces again?"**

You may be too old to rock mermaid-green hair or actually enjoy K-pop, but you haven't missed the boat on braces. Teeth can get straightened at any age, but most people get them in line around age 11 or 12—right around the time you have a growth spurt during puberty that includes your face and jaw, says Ana Castilla, DDS, an affiliate assistant professor of orthodontics at the Oregon Health and Science University.

Metal braces still reign supreme in her practice because they're what teens tend to prefer, but the slightly more expensive clear aligners (from places like Invisalign or Smile Direct) are a close second and no longer reserved for people whose chompers need only a minor

tweak. While good old railroad-track-style metal braces tend to be more affordable than aligners, depending on where you live and how generous your insurance is, you could spend \$6,000 and 20 months wearing either option. Aside from the expense and the aesthetics, aligners get taken out when you eat, which at least anecdotally has been linked to weight loss: When you have to take the aligner out every time you have anything other than water, it makes that handful of popcorn look far less appealing. The fact that you do have to take them out often can be a con ("has anyone seen my phone, my sunglasses...and my braces?!"). If you tend to misplace stuff all the time, traditional braces might be a better bet, Castilla says.

**"My kid was hotdogging on his mountain bike (yes, a girl was involved. No, she was not impressed) and lost a tooth. What are his options?"**

The best choice for making your Jack less of an "o'-lantern" is a titanium-post implant, which places a custom-made crown directly into the jawbone. That said, it's not recommended until a kid stops growing (for boys, that's usually 17; for girls, around 15). Until then, you can consider a bridge, which is a permanent fake tooth bonded to neighboring teeth, or a partial denture, which clips in and out. (Our Spidey senses tell us your son might enjoy the now-you-see-it-now-you-don't trick of the partial denture.)

**"Iced coffee, frozen yogurt, even the water from the bubbler at the gym all hurt my teeth. Why?"**

Your teeth are going topless: Sensitivity usually happens when your gums recede, leaving the roots naked and exposed. But it could also be that—thanks to dry mouth, too many acidic foods or just aging—your teeth's protective enamel has become thin and brittle, so the cores are no longer properly protected, says L.A. dentist Jon



Marashi, DDS. For a temporary fix, try a desensitizing toothpaste (he likes Hello Sensitivity Relief, \$4). For a more permanent solution, consider a resin dental filler or a custom inlay to cover or restore weakened enamel. For a gum issue, you'll need to consult a periodontist, who may need to surgically extend the gum line, Marashi says. If a tooth is sensitive all the time, not just when you eat cold or hot foods, it may be badly decayed or infected and need a root canal (which, despite the scary rep, is really just a lot like getting a cavity filled).

**"My sink looks like a bloody Game of Thrones episode whenever I floss. That's normal, right?"**

"Bleeding usually means gum disease," says Bayside, NY, dentist Greg Gelfand, DDS. A mild case may require using a prescription mouth rinse like Peridex and (womp womp) flossing more often. More serious cases may mean that you'll need scaling and planing of your teeth and gums. That's a deep cleaning in the pockets between your teeth and gums and a smoothing out of the roots so they'll reconnect to the gum tissue. It's just as unpleasant as it sounds, but get it over with: The earlier you catch gum disease, the better your chances of an easier fix—and of avoiding serious complications, including tooth loss.

**"I chipped a tooth and that jagged little thing is so annoying—and yet, I can't stop running my tongue over it. How do I fix this?"**

If the rest of your smile is solid, your dentist can use composite bonding to fill in the missing piece, Marashi says. If you have a mouth full of chipped teeth (think: going over the handlebars of your bike), you may need veneers, which "involves changing the frontal covers of the teeth. It's like refacing your kitchen cabinets," Marashi says. They are expensive but have the added benefits of instant whitening and better tooth alignment.

## Brush Up on Brushing

**If you're brushing your teeth twice a day but flossing twice a year (and that's in a good year!), you're not alone. But it's time to change your ways. Brushing only removes plaque from the front and back surfaces of your teeth; flossing is what removes all the bacteria and debris between teeth and under gums.**

❑ **If you hate flossing, there's a work-around. You can ditch the stringy stuff as long as you replace it with another type of "interdental cleaner," like a Dentek Slim Brush (\$3.85 for 32) or Waterpik Sonic-Fusion (\$170), or an air flosser, like Philips Sonicare AirFloss Ultra (\$90). Notice that toothpick and business card are not on the list!**

❑ **Mouthwash is nice but not necessary. You might want to use one if you have morning breath that lingers all day (Lazare likes an alcohol-free formula like SmartMouth The Original Activated Mouthwash, \$10). Your dentist may also recommend a rinse designed to strengthen enamel (like ACT Restoring Mouthwash, \$6) or to relieve sensitivity (like Listerine Sensitivity Zero Alcohol Mouthrinse, \$4).**

## DENTAL MYTHS BUSTED!

**Myth**

*Everyone has to get their wisdom teeth out.*

Not everyone needs this sore-gums-and-chipmunk-cheeks experience. If your kid has crowded teeth already, or the wisdom teeth are impacted below the gums, or if they're coming in at a weird angle that will push the other teeth out of alignment, get them removed when your kid is still in their late teens or early 20s. That's when gum tissue is softer and heals more easily.

**Myth**

*Fluoride is a dangerous toxin.*

Only in massive doses—like you ingest an entire tube of tooth paste. The fact is, fluoride is a naturally occurring mineral, and most experts—including those at the American Dental Association—say you should brush your teeth with a fluoride toothpaste twice a day, because it reduces your risk of cavities by about 25%.

**Myth**

*A manual toothbrush is worthless.*

Most dentists prefer electric, but manual brushes are totally fine. It's just that "an electric brush generates more strokes per second, so it's more effective for the amount of time it's being used," says Marc Lazare, DDS, with the NYU College of Dentistry. That's especially helpful when you're trying to make sure those hard-to-reach back teeth have been properly polished.

When choosing a model, look for features like a timer, to keep you brushing for two minutes, and an indicator that shows if you're pressing too hard. "An electric brush causes less trauma to the gums and teeth. Many overzealous manual brush users bang into their gums or scrub too hard," Lazare explains. For a brush that's loaded with tons of bells and whistles, he likes the Philips Sonicare DiamondClean Smart (\$240).

**Myth**

*You can revive a graying tooth.*

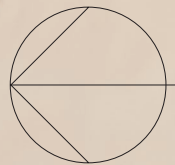
A moment of silence for that dead tooth—because it's most likely not coming back to life. That grayness is triggered by trauma (like a fall) or a cavity that infected the nerve, Gelfand says. In many cases, a root canal can enable you to hang on to the outer "shell" of your tooth, which you can then get fitted with a (nice and newly pearly white!) crown to keep the tooth from breaking.



**Floss  
daily—not  
yearly.**







**To make  
teeth look  
whiter, go for  
a red lipstick  
with blue,  
not yellow,  
undertones.**

more  
whitening tips  
on page 44



Best & Worst Foods for Your Teeth

Red wine and sticky candies are clearly awful, but some mega offenders aren't quite so obvious. It's not all bad news, though: You might also be surprised to learn that certain foods can actually help protect your pearly whites.

Caution!

CRACKERS	"They're a top cavity causer," along with pretzels and chips, since they get caught between your teeth and break down into simple sugars, Lazare says.
ICE	Chewing it can cause tooth fractures. Ouch.
ENERGY DRINKS	They're loaded with citric acid, which is "like battery acid on your teeth," Marashi says.

Eat Up!

APPLES	They increase the flow of saliva and help brush away debris and surface stains. Ditto celery and carrots.
CHEESE	It's high in calcium and phosphates, which you need for healthy teeth. "It can help combat tooth erosion by balancing your mouth's pH levels," Lazare says.
DARK CHOCOLATE	It's low in sugar and melts easily, so it doesn't get stuck. Plus it contains theobromine, an antioxidant that protects against gum disease and tooth erosion.

HOW TO WHITEN YOUR TEETH

Somewhere along the way, your teeth morphed from pearly white to kind of a corn-niblet yellow. It happens... and not just to those of us who are fueled by coffee and red wine. To get your smile back to brighter and whiter, try any of these options.



Lip Service

Contrast is key, so celebrity makeup artist Mickey Williams says to go for a berry or red lipstick with blue undertones that make your teeth look whiter. Two to try: Maybelline New York SuperStay Matte Ink City Edition in Artist or Dancer, \$10 each.



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Strip Away

The most readily available way to whiten is with a drug-store kit, which usually uses a 9.5% solution of hydrogen

peroxide (an ultra-effective bleaching agent). NYC dentist Elisa Mello recommends strip kits (like Crest 3D White Professional Effects Whitestrips, \$60), because they're easy to apply and the strips adhere quickly and stay put. You'll start to see a slight difference in just three days, and your teeth will be at least one shade lighter within 20 days.



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Lights On

Try an at-home premium whitening system, like Smile Direct Club's Bright On (\$79). The kit comes with nine hydrogen peroxide bleaching pens and an LED mouthpiece. First, use the pen to brush each tooth in a circular motion, then bite on the light-up mouthpiece to activate the formula. To remove years' worth of tough stains (hello, coffee), use the kit for 10 minutes twice a day for one week. It's powered by your phone, so you can whiten while sitting at your desk, lounging on the couch or even carting your teen around town. In a week, expect a smile that's at least one to two shades lighter.

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Go Pro

If you want the brightest smile ASAP, have your dentist custom-make you whitening trays (\$250 to \$500). For five nights, you'll squeeze a whitening gel (typically formulated with carbamide peroxide) into the tray, bite in and leave it in place for 20 minutes. You can do this every day for up to five days, though if you experience sensitivity, you should back off and only do it every other day. The trays are reusable, so you can maintain the results; just be sure to wait three months between treatments, Mello says. You can expect a whiter smile in five days, and teeth will be at least two to five shades lighter.