

Dental Health During Pregnancy

Your oral health during pregnancy may be easy to overlook due to the many other things that are on your mind. As a parent-to-be, you can help yourself and your unborn child achieve the rewards of good oral health by following these dental-care tips.

- Brush at least twice a day with fluoride toothpaste. If possible, brush after each meal and snack.
- Floss once a day
- Maintain a balanced diet. Choose nutritious snacks.
- Schedule regular dental visits and periodic professional cleaning as recommended by your dentist.

Here are some dental issues to be aware of during pregnancy. Ask your dental provider if you have any questions.

Pregnancy Gingivitis

As a woman's hormone levels change during pregnancy, she may react more to the irritants or toxins in plaque, the soft, sticky bacterial film found on teeth. The result is gum tissue that is more susceptible to soreness, redness and bleeding. This condition is often referred to as "pregnancy gingivitis." You can prevent gingivitis by removing plaque daily by thoroughly brushing and flossing, and by eating a balanced diet for healthy gums.

Tooth Decay

There is a myth that a tooth is lost for every pregnancy. This is not true. Decay and subsequent tooth loss results from repeated acid attacks on the tooth enamel, not from repeated pregnancies. Here are things that contribute to an increased number of cavities:

- *Gum tenderness during pregnancy.* This may cause you to avoid brushing and flossing as thoroughly as necessary.
- *Stomach acids produced from nausea and vomiting.* They may lead to tooth enamel breakdown and increased chance for cavities.
- *Smaller stomach size later in pregnancy.* Pregnant women then eat smaller meals more often and expose teeth to greater risk for cavities.

You can prevent tooth decay by:

- Increasing fluoride use
 - Drink fluoridated city tap water
 - Use a fluoride toothpaste
 - Use an over-the-counter fluoride rinse, if recommended

- Changing dietary habits
 - Make wise food choices
 - Limit “grazing”
 - Limit soft drinks (both regular and diet sodas)

Nutrition and Your Baby’s Teeth

What you eat during pregnancy affects the development of your unborn child’s teeth. Since your baby’s teeth begin to develop during the third to sixth months of pregnancy, it is important that you receive sufficient amounts of nutrients, including vitamins A, C and D, protein, calcium, folic acid and phosphorous.

For good oral health during and beyond pregnancy:

- Eat a balanced diet and follow the recommendations of the food guide pyramid.
- Limit how often and how long you eat sticky, sugary and starchy snacks.
- When you snack, choose nutritious foods, such as hard aged cheese, raw vegetables, plain yogurt or fruit.
- When you eat soft, sticky, sweet foods —such as cake, candy and dried fruit —have them as part of a meal. More saliva is released during a meal, which helps wash food and the cavity-causing bacteria in plaque away from teeth.
- Brush after snacking.
- Chew sugarless gum or xylitol-sweetened gum after meals if you can’t brush. (Xylitol gum is found in HealthPartners pharmacies.)

Dental Visits During Pregnancy

Continue to have regular dental visits throughout your pregnancy. Preventive oral hygiene appointments can generally be performed safely during pregnancy. Only the x-rays that are necessary for treatment should be taken. Your dentist will suggest that you wear a lead apron over your abdomen during the x-ray. Elective procedures should be postponed until after your baby’s birth.

Medications

Some medications and anesthetics may be used during and after dental treatment to make procedures more comfortable. Only those medications that have minimal side effects will be used.

Prenatal Fluoride Supplements

Prenatal fluoride supplements are **not** recommended for pregnant women. Research has not proven the effectiveness of fluoride supplements in preventing cavities in baby’s teeth.

By practicing healthy oral hygiene, you will be a role model for your children. If you have any questions, please discuss them with your prenatal care or dental provider.

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