

# Oral Health: An Important Part of a Healthy Pregnancy

Are you about to be a new mom? Pregnancy is a time to take especially good care of your oral health. When you are pregnant, it is important to take good care of your teeth, mouth and gums in order to prevent dental problems that could affect you and your baby. You can help yourself, and your baby, have a healthy start by practicing healthy dental habits and eating a nutritious diet.



Be sure to tell your dentist if you are pregnant, or possibly could be pregnant so that your dentist is aware of your pregnancy before providing treatment or using any medications or X-rays.

## Pregnancy Can Affect the Health of Your Gums and Teeth

Pregnant women have an increased risk for inflammation of the gums because increases in hormone levels cause increased gum sensitivity. Gum sensitivity results in an exaggerated response to dental plaque. This situation can cause gingivitis which is characterized by red, swollen and tender gums. Practicing good oral hygiene to adequately remove dental plaque is important to maintaining good oral health.

Pregnant women also are at risk of developing pregnancy tumors. These benign, inflammatory growths occur when swollen gums become irritated and usually shrink soon after pregnancy is over. If not, these pregnancy tumors can be removed after the baby is delivered.

Some studies appear to indicate that women with periodontal disease may be at increased risk for pre-term, low birth weight babies. Although more research is needed to confirm the direct association to pregnancy outcomes, expectant mothers are advised to be concerned about periodontitis as with all other infections. It is important to check your gum health throughout your pregnancy. See your dentist if your gums become inflamed or swollen during pregnancy.

During pregnancy, some women increase in-between meal snacking. Expectant mothers can become more prone to tooth decay if they consume foods high in sugar content more frequently. It is important to limit in-between meal snacking of foods that are high in sugar. When a snack is needed, select foods that are nutritious for both mother and baby, like raw fruits and vegetables. Following your physician's dietary advice is the best course of action during your pregnancy.

Some women experience "morning sickness" during the first few months of pregnancy. This nausea and vomiting may cause tooth erosion. Erosion is the loss of tooth enamel caused by frequent contact with stomach acid. When tooth enamel is eroded away, the dentin underneath is exposed. This may lead to pain and sensitivity, and may increase the risk of tooth decay. What can you do to neutralize the effects of stomach acid on your teeth? Immediately after vomiting, rinse your mouth with baking soda mixed in water, or with a sugar-free mouth rinse, or with plain water if nothing else is available.

## Dental Visits While You Are Pregnant

Dental experts recommend visiting a dentist for a checkup if you are planning to become pregnant or as soon as you find out you are pregnant. Your dentist can assess your oral health and determine how frequently you need to be seen during your pregnancy in order to maintain optimal oral health. Some dental experts recommend limiting the first trimester of pregnancy to emergency dental treatment only. If you need non-emergency dental procedures, the second trimester is usually recommended. Be sure to tell your dentist if you are pregnant, or possibly could be pregnant, so that your dentist is aware of your pregnancy before providing treatment or using any medications or x-rays.

## Good Nutrition Is Important for Mother and Baby

Maintaining good nutrition during pregnancy is important for the health of both mother and baby. Your baby's teeth begin to develop during the second trimester of pregnancy. Be sure to get plenty of nutrients (calcium, protein, phosphorous, Vitamins A, C and D) from foods and prenatal vitamins that your physician may recommend.

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(cont. page 2)

For more  
oral health  
information,  
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Web site at  
[www.decare.com](http://www.decare.com)

## Calcium and Your Teeth

The calcium your baby needs is provided by what you eat, not by your teeth. It is a myth that calcium from your teeth will be lost during pregnancy. If you do not take in enough calcium, your body will use calcium stored in your bones — not from your teeth — to help your baby grow, so be sure to eat a healthy and nutritious diet.

## After Your Baby Arrives

Did you know that babies who nap or sleep at night with a bottle containing anything but plain water can develop baby bottle tooth decay? This happens when sugary liquids pool around an infant's or toddler's teeth and gums for long periods. Even liquids that are good for the baby, such as milk, formula, breast milk and fruit juices contain natural sugars that can promote decay. Resist the temptation to allow your baby to fall asleep with a bottle containing a sweet or sugary liquid.

## Caring for Your Baby's Teeth

Starting at birth, clean your baby's gums with a clean, damp, soft cloth or gauze pad after each feeding. Begin brushing your baby's teeth with a small soft toothbrush as soon as the first tooth erupts, usually around six months. Continue cleaning gums in the toothless areas. Your child should have their first visit to the dentist around the time of their first birthday.

## Dental Health Habits

To prevent oral health problems, good dental habits are important during pregnancy.

1. Visit your dentist for a checkup if you are planning to become pregnant or as soon as you find out you are pregnant. Be sure to tell your dentist if you are pregnant, or possibly could be pregnant, so that your dentist is aware of your pregnancy before providing treatment or using any medications or x-rays.
2. Be aware of your oral health. See your dentist at the first sign of trouble, such as swollen gums.
3. Tell your dentist about changes in your medical history and about any medications you are taking, and talk to your dentist or physician if you are having oral or general health problems.
4. Use a fluoride toothpaste and drink fluoridated water.
5. Practice good oral hygiene by brushing and flossing daily.
6. Have healthy nutrition; eat a balanced diet and limit in-between meal snacks of high sugar-containing foods. Drink water instead of soda or sugary drinks.
7. Do not use tobacco products in any form.

**Pregnancy is a great time to renew and establish or re-establish good oral health habits. Your oral health does matter during your pregnancy — not only to you but also to your baby. Choose to make a healthy difference in your life and that of your baby by taking care of your oral health during pregnancy.**