

## Mothers and Babies

Pregnancy and the first year of your baby's life are very special and important. You'll want to take good care of yourself and get your baby off to a healthy start. Your dental health is an important part of your overall health. Good oral health habits not only help prevent problems during pregnancy, they can also benefit the health of your unborn child.

### Before Your Baby Arrives

#### Eat a Healthy Diet

**What you eat during pregnancy affects the growth of your unborn child—including his or her teeth.** Your baby's teeth begin to develop between the third and sixth month of pregnancy, so it is important that you receive enough nutrients, especially calcium, protein, phosphorous, and vitamins A, C, and D.

It is a myth that calcium is lost from the mother's teeth during pregnancy. The calcium your baby needs is provided by your diet, not by your teeth. **So be sure to get enough calcium in your diet.** You can do this by having at least three servings of dairy products per day. Or your obstetrician may recommend that you take calcium pills.

#### Snacking and Tooth Decay

During pregnancy, many women feel hungry between meals. While this is normal, frequent snacking on sugary foods can cause acids to attack the teeth. Repeated acid attacks can cause tooth decay. Also, the infection caused by decay can spread. Either of these problems must be treated by a dentist.

**Try to resist the urge to snack constantly.** When you need a snack, choose healthy foods for you and your baby, such as raw fruits and vegetables and dairy products. See [www.choosemyplate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.gov) and follow your physician's advice.

#### How Pregnancy May Affect Your Gums

Here's another reason to maintain good oral health while you are pregnant: Pregnancy hormones can make your gum tissue more sensitive to plaque. Your gums may become red, tender, and likely to bleed easily when you brush your teeth. This condition is called gingivitis (jin-ja-VIE-tis).

**Gingivitis is very common during pregnancy (and afterward, if you nurse). Your dentist may advise you to have cleanings more often during your second trimester or early third trimester to help you avoid problems.**

In some women, growths of tissue called "pregnancy tumors" appear on the gums, most often during the second trimester. These growths or swellings are usually found between the teeth and are

believed to be related to excess plaque. They bleed easily and look red and raw. They usually disappear after the baby is born.

## Daily Care

**To help prevent tooth decay and gum disease, brush your teeth twice a day** with fluoride toothpaste to remove plaque. Be sure to floss or use another between-the-teeth cleaner daily. Ask your dentist or hygienist to show you how to brush and floss correctly. When choosing oral care products, look for ones that have the American Dental Association's Seal of Acceptance, which tells you that they meet ADA standards for safety and effectiveness.



## Dental Visits

When asked about your medical history, be sure to **tell your dentist if you are pregnant** or are planning to become pregnant soon. Also tell your dentist about any changes in your health, any medicines you are taking (whether prescription or over-the-counter products), or any medical advice your physician has given you.

During pregnancy, keep seeing your dentist regularly for oral exams and teeth cleaning. If you are worried about the effect any drug, treatment, or x-ray might have on your pregnancy, discuss your concerns with your dentist and physician.

## Dental X-Rays

Radiation from dental x-rays is low. Current guidelines say it is more risky for a pregnant woman to postpone necessary dental treatment than to have an x-ray. **This is because dental disease not treated during pregnancy can lead to problems for you and your baby.**

Tell your dentist if you are or might be pregnant. If an x-ray exam is needed, the dentist will take steps to keep the x-ray exposure as low as possible.

## After Your Baby Is Born

### Your Baby's Teeth

Your child's primary (baby) teeth begin to appear about six months after birth. Most children have a full set of 20 baby teeth by age three. Strong, healthy baby teeth help your child chew food easily, learn to speak clearly, and smile. They also help give your child's face its shape.

### Tooth Decay in Baby Teeth

**A baby's teeth can start to decay as soon as they appear in the mouth.** Decay can start when teeth are in contact with sugary liquids often and for long periods. These liquids include fruit juice, soda, and other drinks containing sugar. If decay is not treated, it can destroy the baby teeth of an infant or young child.

### Tooth Care for Your Baby

**The good news is that your child can avoid tooth decay.** By starting oral care at an early age, you will help your child learn lifelong good dental habits. Here are a few simple steps you can take to keep your child's smile healthy:

- **Never allow your baby or toddler to fall asleep with a bottle of milk, formula, fruit juices, or any other liquids that contain sugar OR a pacifier dipped in sugar or honey.** Do not allow children to have frequent sips of sugary liquids from bottles or training cups.

- **Do not put a pacifier in your mouth to clean it and then put it in the baby's mouth.** You may pass decay-causing bacteria to the baby.

- **Start cleaning your baby's mouth early.** Before teeth appear, wipe the baby's gums with a wet washcloth or a clean gauze pad after each feeding. As soon as the first tooth appears, start brushing your baby's teeth twice a day (morning and night). Use a soft-bristled, child-sized toothbrush and a fluoride toothpaste. Until the child is three years old, use no more than a smear or grain-of-rice-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste.

If your baby has sore or tender gums as teeth begin to appear, gently massage the gums with a clean finger, small cool spoon, or damp gauze pad. Your dentist or pediatrician may recommend a pacifier or teething ring.

- **Plan your child's first dental visit after the first tooth appears but no later than the first birthday.** Think of the first dental visit as a "well-baby checkup" for the teeth. Your dentist will check for decay, look for other tooth problems, and teach you how to clean your child's teeth. The dentist will also look at your baby's tooth and jaw development.

- **Check your child's teeth regularly.** From time to time, lift the baby's lips and check the teeth for any changes. If you see white or stained areas on the teeth at any time, take your child to the dentist.

- **Share information about preventing early childhood tooth decay with others who may be helping care for your child.**

- **Getting the right amount of fluoride is best**—not too much and not too little. Your dentist, pediatrician, or family physician can help you make sure your child is getting enough fluoride to prevent cavities.

- **Take good care of your own teeth.** Continue to visit your dentist regularly after your baby is born. If your own mouth is healthy, your baby has a better chance of having a healthy mouth.