

Keeping your mouth healthy during pregnancy

Good oral health is an important part of good overall health, which is especially important during pregnancy. By paying attention to your oral hygiene and eating habits, you can go a long way toward keeping your mouth healthy. Your dentist also can help you take care of your teeth and gingivae (gums) during this special time.

PRACTICE GOOD ORAL HYGIENE

Daily care of your teeth and mouth is the foundation of oral health. The American Dental Association offers the following advice for developing a good oral hygiene routine:

- Brush your teeth gently twice a day with a soft-bristled toothbrush and a toothpaste containing fluoride. The size and shape of your brush should fit your mouth, allowing you to reach all areas easily.
- Replace your toothbrush every three or four months or sooner if the bristles are frayed. A worn toothbrush won't do a good job of cleaning your teeth and can irritate your gums.
- Clean between your teeth with floss or another interdental cleaner daily. This helps remove the thin layer of bacteria (plaque) that forms on your teeth and food particles from between your teeth and under the gumline.
- Look for the ADA Seal of Acceptance on the oral health products that you buy. The Seal indicates that the product is safe and effective when used as directed.

Eat a healthy diet made up of various foods from the following groups: grains, vegetables, fruits, dairy products, protein, and fats or oils. Try to limit your snacking. Each time you consume foods or beverages that contain sugar, the bacteria in your mouth release acids that attack your teeth, increasing your risk of developing tooth decay (cavities).

VISIT YOUR DENTIST

If your last dental visit took place more than six months ago, or if you are experiencing any oral health problems, schedule an appointment to see your dentist.

Your dentist may check the oral cavity for problems such as tooth decay, swollen or bleed-

ing gums and sores elsewhere in the mouth, as well as for signs of infection or trauma. As part of a full examination, your dentist may need to take radiographs (x-rays). Oral health care, including the use of x-rays, pain medication and local anesthesia, is safe throughout pregnancy.¹ Although the radiation from dental x-rays is very low, your dentist will cover you with a leaded apron to shield your abdomen and thyroid.

Some special oral health problems also arise during pregnancy that may require professional treatment. For example, hormonal changes can affect your gums, causing swelling or tenderness. Your gums also may bleed a little when you brush or floss. This condition is called gingivitis. The gum tissue itself also can develop one or more red, raw-looking lumps that usually have a bumpy texture. These are called "pregnancy tumors" but are not related to cancer. These lumps typically go away after the baby is born; however, because they can interfere with eating and thorough brushing and flossing, your dentist may suggest removing them.

To provide the best care, your dentist will need some information about your overall health and your pregnancy. He or she may ask these questions:

- How many weeks pregnant are you? When is your due date?
- What, if any, over-the-counter or prescription medications are you taking?
- Do you have swollen or bleeding gums, a toothache (pain), problems eating or chewing food, or other problems in your mouth?

Make a commitment to good oral health during your pregnancy: practice good daily oral hygiene, adopt healthy eating habits and make regular visits to your dentist. ■

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"For the Dental Patient" provides general information on dental treatments to dental patients. It is designed to prompt discussion between dentist and patient about treatment options and does not substitute for the dentist's professional assessment based on the individual patient's needs and desires.

1. Oral Health Care During Pregnancy Expert Workgroup. 2012. Oral Health Care During Pregnancy: A National Consensus Statement—Summary of an Expert Workgroup Meeting. Washington: National Maternal and Child Oral Health Resource Center, Georgetown University. www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/MCAHOraHealth/Documents/MCAH-OHP-OralHealthPregnancyConsensus2011.pdf. Accessed Oct. 1, 2013.