

Pregnancy and Dental Care

The Oral Connection

“Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey understands my need to get my baby’s life off to a healthy start.”



Good oral health habits not only help prevent oral problems during pregnancy, they can also affect the health of your unborn child.

What women eat during pregnancy affects the development of their unborn child, including their teeth. A baby’s teeth begin to develop between the third and sixth month of pregnancy, so it’s important that women receive sufficient amounts of nutrients, especially calcium, protein, phosphorous and vitamins A, C and D. If a pregnant woman is not providing enough calcium to her unborn child, her body will take this mineral from stores in her bones, including her teeth.

It’s also important to realize that an increase in hormones exaggerates the way gum tissues react to irritants in plaque. However, it is the plaque, not the hormone level, that is the major cause of gum disease, making proper oral care all the more important for pregnant women.*

Did you know ...

- An expectant woman’s gum disease may indicate an increased probability of a preterm birth?
- Pregnant women with chronic periodontal disease during the second trimester are up to seven times more likely to give birth prematurely?

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Many women who previously had healthy teeth and gums may notice that their gums bleed and become swollen or inflamed during their pregnancy. This condition is sometimes called "pregnancy gingivitis." It may appear as early as the first trimester and is the result of changing hormone levels, including increased amounts of progesterone.

Receiving professional dental care during pregnancy is important. Your dentist will know the appropriate precautions and may even recommend an additional cleaning during your second trimester or early third trimester. For more information, please speak with your physician and/or dentist.

Dos:

- **Brush thoroughly with a fluoride toothpaste twice a day.**
- **Floss between your teeth once a day.**
- **Continue to see your dentist regularly for oral exams and professional teeth cleaning during pregnancy.**
- **Choose snack foods that are nutritious for you and your baby, such as raw fruits, vegetables and dairy products.**

Don'ts:

- **Frequently snack on foods containing carbohydrates.**
- **Ignore changes in your mouth.**
- **Buy into the myth that dental treatment is not safe for pregnant women.**

Be sure to visit your dentist regularly ... it could improve the quality of your life.

* Tooth decay results from repeated acid attacks on tooth enamel. The decay process begins with plaque, the sticky layer of harmful bacteria that constantly forms on the teeth. The bacteria uses sugar and starch, ingredients found in most foods and beverages, to produce damaging acids. Plaque that remains on your teeth can irritate the gums, making them red, tender and likely to bleed. This condition is called gingivitis and can lead to more serious periodontal diseases affecting the gums and bones that anchor teeth in place.

Sources: The American Dental Association. March of Dimes. Journal of the American Dental Association, July 2001, "Oral health during pregnancy: an analysis of information"



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