

Mothers and Babies

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

Before Your Baby Arrives

Eat a Balanced Diet

What you eat during the nine months of pregnancy affects the growth of your unborn child-including 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. If you do not get enough calcium from the foods you eat, however, your body will provide this mineral from stores in your bones. 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 a normal urge, frequent snacking on sugary foods can invite tooth decay. The decay process begins with plaque (rhymes with "back"), an invisible, sticky layer of harmful bacteria that constantly forms on teeth. The bacteria convert sugar that remains in the mouth to acid that attacks tooth enamel. The longer sugars stay in your mouth, the longer the acids attack. After repeated attacks, tooth decay can result.

Eat nutritious, well-balanced meals made up of foods from the major food groups:

- grains, half of them whole grains
- vegetables
- fruits
- milk products
- lean meats, poultry, fish, beans, eggs, and nuts

Try to resist the urge to snack constantly. When you need a snack, choose foods that are nutritious for you and your baby, such as raw fruits and vegetables and dairy products. See

www.choosemyplate.gov and follow your physician's advice about a diet that is best for you.

How Pregnancy May Affect Your Gums

Here's another reason to maintain good oral health during pregnancy: The plaque on your teeth can make your gums red, tender, and likely to bleed easily when you brush your teeth. This condition is called gingivitis (jin-ja-VIE-tis) and can lead to more serious diseases affecting the gums and bone that hold your teeth in place.

During pregnancy, your body's hormone levels rise greatly. These hormones can make your gum tissue more sensitive to plaque. That is why gingivitis is especially common during pregnancy. Your dentist may recommend more frequent cleanings 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 have a red, raw-looking appearance. They usually disappear after the baby is born. If necessary, they can be surgically removed. If you notice pregnancy tumors or any other changes in your mouth during pregnancy, see your dentist.

Oral Care

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



Dental Visits

As part of your regular medical history, tell your dentist if you are pregnant or are planning to become pregnant soon. Be sure to tell your dentist about any changes in your health, any medicines you are taking (whether prescription or over-the-counter products), or any advice your physician has given you.

During pregnancy, continue to see 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. In fact, 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 is needed, the leaded apron and thyroid collar you wear during x-rays will help protect you and the fetus.

After Your Baby Is Born

Your Baby's Teeth

Your child's "baby" or primary 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 and form.

Early Childhood Tooth Decay



Moderate Decay

Sometimes parents and other caregivers do not realize that a baby's teeth can start to decay as soon as they appear in the mouth. Decay in infants and toddlers is called early childhood caries. It occurs when teeth are frequently exposed to sugary liquids such as fruit juice, soda, milk, breast milk and formula for long periods of time. Early childhood caries can destroy the teeth of an infant or young child. It can even harm the adult teeth forming in the jaws.

The good news is that your child can avoid tooth decay. To help reduce the risk of tooth decay, babies and toddlers should finish their naptime and bedtime bottles before going to bed. Children should not be allowed frequent sips of sugary liquids from bottles or training cups, since this can also lead to decay.

Oral Care for Your Baby

By starting oral care at an early age, you will help your child build a lifetime of 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 containing milk, formula, fruit juices or sweetened liquids OR a pacifier dipped in sugar or honey.** If your baby is thirsty or needs comfort between regular feedings or at bedtime, offer water or a clean pacifier recommended by your dentist or pediatrician.
- **Begin oral care early.** Wipe the baby's gums with a wet washcloth or a clean gauze pad after each feeding. Begin brushing your child's teeth with a little water as soon as the first tooth appears. Consult your child's dentist or physician if you are considering using fluoride toothpaste before age two. 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, teething ring or special "numbing salve" for the gums.
- **Schedule your child's first visit to the dentist by the first birthday.** This can help start a good relationship between your child and the dentist. In addition to checking for decay and other problems, your dentist will teach you how to clean your child's teeth daily and identify fluoride needs. The dentist will assess how the teeth are developing and let you know if your child may later need treatment for crooked teeth or a "bad bite." Look at the first dental visit as a "well-baby check-up" for the teeth.
- **Check your child's teeth regularly.** As soon as the first tooth comes in, 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 to 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 determine how to optimize your child's fluoride intake.

- **Take good care of your own teeth.** Continue to visit your dental office regularly for oral exams and professional teeth cleaning after your baby is born. If your own mouth is healthy, you are less likely to pass bacteria to your baby.

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