



Better Oral Health for a Healthier Pregnancy

Dental Care While Pregnant

With everything you have to consider during pregnancy, paying special attention to your oral health doesn't always get the attention it deserves. It should, because there are several dental-related problems that are more likely to develop during pregnancy due to the unique changes happening to your body.

You want to be extra diligent about the following oral health conditions, but don't worry—early detection and treatment can prevent them from adversely affecting you or your baby.

- **Gingivitis** is usually identified by red, swollen gums that may even bleed when you brush. Since this can often lead to more serious periodontitis, prompt treatment is your best defense.
- **Tooth decay** can plague a pregnant woman who has never had a cavity before, because of increased acidity in the mouth—which is often a side effect of morning sickness and dietary changes.
- **Loose teeth or tooth loss** occur more frequently when you're pregnant because of elevated levels of progesterone and estrogen. These hormones can affect tissues and bones that keep your teeth in place.
- **Severe gum disease (periodontitis)** is an infection of the gum tissue and bone that support your teeth. Often caused by a reaction to bacteria, periodontitis can also develop from hormonal changes in pregnancy. Research suggests that the bacteria that cause this inflammation can actually get into the bloodstream and affect the fetus, which could lead to pre-term labor and low-birth-weight babies.¹

Seeing your dentist is more important than ever

Even someone with a lifelong history of good oral health can develop dental health issues unique to pregnancy. To minimize your risk:

- **Schedule regular dental visits** starting early in the pregnancy. Tell your dentist you're pregnant so they can evaluate you with pregnancy's increased risks in mind.
- **Tell your dentist the details about any drugs and prenatal vitamins you are taking**, as well as specific medical advice your doctor has provided.
- **Don't put off cleanings and X-rays** that can help detect problems early. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists has ruled X-rays not only safe, but important, as are root canals and filling cavities that could lead to further complications if left untreated.²
- **Eat healthy foods**, which almost sounds too simple. But giving you and your baby healthy nutrients like calcium, proteins and vitamin A, C and D will help baby's teeth, among other things, develop between the third and sixth month.

- **Avoid sugary snacks** even if you have sweet cravings. With an increased risk of tooth decay, the less sugar the better.
- **Floss once a day and brush twice a day** using a soft-bristle brush and fluoride toothpaste—they're the best front-line defense against gum disease.
- **Call your dentist** if you notice any of the following: bad breath, gums that are painful to the touch, loose teeth, sores, lumps or growths in your mouth, discolored, shiny or swollen gums, toothache or general mouth pain.

Your dentists and hygienists are educated and equipped to detect what could develop into serious problems for you and your baby. And seeing them during your pregnancy is a great opportunity to discuss good oral health habits for newborns. A little planning and regular visits to the dentist are simple solutions that provide an invaluable payback.



In the U.S., approximately 40% of pregnant women have some form of periodontal disease—which includes gingivitis and cavities.²

¹ Journal of Natural Science, Biology and Medicine. Periodontitis: A risk for deliver of premature labor and low-birth-weight infants. Jul-Dec 2010. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3217279/>

² The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. Dental X-Rays, Teeth Cleanings=Safe During Pregnancy. July 2013. <http://www.acog.org/Clinical-Guidance-and-Publications/Committee...re-During-Pregnancy-and-Through-the-Lifespan>