

dental health



Oral health during pregnancy

Find out how to maintain your oral health while you are pregnant with these simple tips

disease have been associated with an increased risk for both premature birth, and having a low birth-weight baby – so don't put off dental work. Having local anaesthesia, for dental work is safe throughout pregnancy. And if antibiotics are needed, there are pregnancy-safe ones to choose from. A radiograph (x-ray) may be needed for dental treatment or for a dental emergency that can't wait until after the baby is born. Your dentist will use a leaded apron which minimises exposure to the abdomen. Though dental x-rays give off minimal radiation, it is considered best practice to avoid unnecessary dental x-rays until the postpartum period (after the birth).

Eat well

Eat a nutritious diet from a wide variety of foods, this should ensure optimal nourishment both for you and your developing baby. Cravings may be experienced for certain foods. Frequent snacks and drinks, especially sweet ones, can lead to dental caries (decay). Choose a wide variety of snacks, which are low in sugar, fat and salt and high in fibre and calcium. It is helpful to know the five food groups, and to try to eat foods from each group in every meal. The food groups are (a) breads and cereals, (b) dairy products, (c) meat, fish and nuts, (d) fruits and vegetables, and (e) fats. Drinks such as milk and water are recommended. An adequate intake of dairy products – the primary source of calcium – or the supplements your obstetrician may recommend will help ensure that you get all the calcium you need during your pregnancy. Remember your baby's teeth begin to grow soon after you become pregnant, and they continue to develop throughout the pregnancy. At four months into the pregnancy, calcium and phosphorous is needed to help the baby's teeth calcify. Towards the end of your pregnancy, more calcium is

needed and this can be obtained from eating calcium rich foods like dairy products eg. cheese.

Nausea and teeth

Morning sickness (nausea and vomiting) can be experienced throughout the day and sometimes through the pregnancy. The stomach contents are acidic and can potentially dissolve some of the tooth enamel. To avoid tooth damage after vomiting or gastric reflux, don't brush your teeth for at least one hour if you have just vomited. Rinsing your mouth with a fluoridated (again alcohol-free) mouthwash after vomiting though is advisable, as whilst freshening your breath, the fluoride helps to re-mineralise (strengthen) your teeth.

Myths

And finally, it is important to clear up a couple of myths surrounding the dental effects of pregnancy:

- 1 There is no truth in the old wives tale that says a tooth is lost for every pregnancy. Good oral hygiene procedures will ensure that you have healthy teeth and gums during pregnancy.
- 2 Calcium is not lost from the mother's teeth during pregnancy. The calcium your baby needs is provided by your diet, not by your teeth. If dietary calcium is inadequate, however, your body will provide this mineral from stores in your bones.

Pregnancy is a special time for you and to help you to take extra care of your teeth and gums, the following guidelines should be useful:

Look after your teeth

Brush your teeth for two minutes twice a day using a fluoridated toothpaste, and use either dental floss or inter-dental brushes to help clean between the teeth. This can be followed by rinsing with a fluoridated, alcohol-free mouthwash. Hormonal changes during pregnancy can make the gingiva (gums) more prone to bleeding if plaque persists on teeth. If you notice bleeding, brush more thoroughly, and if the bleeding persists, we advise you to consult your dentist or dental hygienist to help you with your individual oral hygiene regime. It is recommended that all pregnant patients be seen at least once during their pregnancy by a dentist or hygienist. Serious gum disease and untreated tooth decay have been associated with pregnancy complications. Studies on periodontal (gum)



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