

A HEALTHY SMILE FOR A GLOWING PREGNANCY

Oral health is important to your complete health care

Congratulations on your pregnancy! A healthy mouth means a healthier you and a healthier baby too.

Did you know that the health of your mouth and teeth is important to your overall health especially during pregnancy? Research has shown that effective daily brushing and flossing, regular dental examinations and professional cleanings can help reduce your risk of pregnancy complications and premature labor.^(1,2,3)

Pregnancy may contribute to some changes in the condition of your mouth tissues and teeth. Morning sickness, changes in eating habits, fatigue and hormone changes can all affect your teeth and gums.

The acid from vomiting will affect your teeth by softening the hard outer surface making it easier for cavities to form.⁽⁴⁾ You will probably want to brush after vomiting; however, using a baking soda rinse instead (1/2 tsp baking soda dissolved in 1/2 to 1 cup water) will neutralize the acid in your mouth and reduce future decay and sensitivity.^(2,5,6) Rinse thoroughly with the baking soda rinse, spit it out and wait 30 minutes before brushing your teeth.⁽⁷⁾

Several factors may lead to diet changes during pregnancy including nausea, cravings, increased nutritional needs and/or fatigue. Some women find that frequent, smaller snacks high in carbohydrates reduce their nausea. However, this practice also increases your risk of tooth decay. It is important to brush after snacks or rinse your mouth with water. Even just a quick rinse with water after eating will help remove food particles and reduce the chances of decay, bleeding or swollen gums.

Hormonal changes that occur during pregnancy contribute to swollen and sensitive gums and are often noticed in the second month.^(2,5) Swollen gums and sensitivity may make it harder for you to brush and floss properly.⁽⁸⁾ If you notice blood on your toothbrush or when you spit, then this can indicate a gum infection has developed. You will want to ensure that you consult with your dental team at this time, because if the gum infection is left untreated this condition can lead to a variety of problems for both you and your unborn child.⁽¹⁾ Once in the blood stream, it is only a matter of time before it reaches the baby. Gum infection can increase the risk of a preterm birth and/or low birth weight baby.^(1,3) You may also be more tired or fatigued when fighting an infection. Hormonal changes can also affect the supporting tissues of your teeth increasing the chances of teeth moving out of position. If you have had orthodontic treatment to straighten your teeth consult with your orthodontist to determine whether you will need to wear your retainer during pregnancy to keep your teeth in position.

You may have some questions about receiving dental treatment while you are pregnant. This is the perfect time to see your dental team for a complete evaluation of your oral health to ensure that there are no conditions that need immediate attention. Having a professional cleaning and topical fluoride treatment is essential to maintaining healthy teeth and tissues during pregnancy.⁽⁹⁾ The second trimester is generally the best time to see your dental professional for necessary dental treatment as it can become quite uncomfortable to lie on your back during the third trimester. If you require essential or emergency dental treatment your dental team will discuss with you and your physician which treatment must be done immediately and which

treatment can be postponed until after your baby is born.⁽⁵⁾ Whether your dental team uses digital or traditional x-rays they will follow the Canadian Dental Association guidelines to ensure the safety of you and your unborn child.^(4,10)

It is important for you to discuss tooth whitening with your dental provider before you go ahead and bleach your teeth. Whitening solutions and strips use a peroxide chemical to bleach the teeth. There is always a potential of ingesting the peroxide chemical and this could cause harm to the unborn child. It is best to wait until after the baby is born.⁽¹¹⁾

Here are some things that you can do to keep your mouth and teeth healthy throughout your pregnancy and after your baby arrives. Flossing between your teeth will help prevent puffy and bleeding gums, keep your breath fresh and reduce your chance of developing cavities between the teeth. Floss before you brush at the end of the day. Using a soft bristled brush topped with a small amount of your usual fluoride toothpaste brush in the morning and most importantly before you go to bed for the night. It is important that you do not swallow the paste, rather, swish your mouth with water to get rid of it all.⁽¹²⁾ It is best to reduce your intake of starchy or sugary snacks by including lots of fresh fruits and vegetables in your daily diet as good nutrition for you and your baby. After eating starchy or sugary snacks, rinse your mouth well with water to reduce the damage they can cause to your teeth.

Effective daily brushing and flossing, regular dental examinations and professional cleanings can help reduce your risk of pregnancy complications and premature labor. Attention to your oral health will keep you smiling throughout your pregnancy!

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