

Pregnancy and Dental Myths and Truths:.

While pregnant as well as for sometime after, you may experience changes in the health of your gums and teeth.

Losing calcium while pregnant?

The old wives' tale that warns a woman to expect a lost tooth for every baby is false. If the mother's intake of calcium is inadequate during pregnancy, her bones – not her teeth – will provide the calcium her growing baby needs. So it is very important to get enough calcium while pregnant. Dairy products, such as milk, cheese, and yogurt -- are good sources of calcium. Other foods that are high in calcium include: spinach, kale, soy beans and some fish, like sardines, salmon, perch, and rainbow trout. There are also foods that are calcium fortified, such as some orange juice, oatmeal, and breakfast cereal, and of course there are calcium pills.

You also need adequate uptake of vitamin D which is necessary to absorb calcium that you ingest. It's a lot harder to get enough vitamin D from foods. Vitamin D is only in a few foods and often in very small amounts. Foods that provide vitamin D include: fatty fish (such as tuna mackerel and salmon), beef liver, cheese and egg yolks. There are also foods fortified with vitamin D, like some dairy products, orange juice, soy milk, and cereals and as with calcium there are pill supplements. Your body can also make vitamin D on its own. When you walk out into the sunlight with exposed skin, your body naturally produces vitamin D on its own.

So what causes dental decay while pregnant?

Most decay is brought about not as a result of your growing baby - but because of diet changes - midnight snacks, chocolate and other cravings. Morning sickness with resulting vomiting increase acid attacks on teeth together with reduced hygiene - because you feel tired and nauseous. Repeated reflux and vomiting can damage tooth enamel and increase the risk of decay. Don't brush your teeth immediately after vomiting. While the teeth are covered in stomach acids, the vigorous action of the toothbrush may cause damage. Rinse your mouth thoroughly with plain tap water. Follow up with a fluoridated mouthwash. If you don't have a fluoridated mouthwash, put a dab of fluoridated toothpaste on your finger and smear it over your teeth. Rinse thoroughly with water. And wait a little while before doing a thorough brushing.

Even after pregnancy, the fatigue of looking after a young family may get in the way of a perfect dental routine.

Pregnancy Gingivitis

Hormonal changes in pregnancy can lead to an exaggerated response to the bacteria and plaque in teeth. This causes gingivitis and bleeding which is often experienced in pregnant women. Regular teeth cleaning is very important while pregnant.

Retching while brushing teeth

Some pregnant women find that brushing their teeth, particularly the molars, provokes retching. However, you risk tooth decay and gum disease if you don't brush regularly. Suggestions include:

You may try a brush with a small head, such as a brush made for toddlers. Take your time. Slow down your brushing action. It may help to close your eyes and concentrate on your breathing. Try other distractions, such as listening to music.

If the taste of the toothpaste seems to provoke your gag reflex, switch to another brand. Alternatively, brush your teeth with water and follow up with a fluoridated mouthwash. Go back to brushing with fluoridated toothpaste as soon as you can

Your dental health can affect your baby

Research has found a link between gum disease in pregnant women and premature birth with low birth weight. Babies who are born prematurely may risk a range of health conditions including cerebral palsy and problems with eyesight and hearing.

Estimates suggest that about 18 out of every 100 premature births may be triggered by periodontal disease, which is a chronic infection of the gums. Appropriate dental treatment for the expectant mother can reduce the risk of premature birth by more than 80 per cent, according to one study.

Is it safe to have dental treatment during pregnancy?

Yes - Also regular hygiene and check-up visits should be booked during pregnancy and after giving birth at 4-6 months intervals. Regular treatment such as fillings, minor cosmetic bonding and orthodontic treatment are quite safe during pregnancy, as is a local anesthetic. However

more complex or elective treatments should usually be postponed until after birth or performed in the middle trimester of pregnancy.

What about x-rays?

Yes - it is safe to have dental X-rays, but unless absolutely necessary we usually wait until after the pregnancy. In Summary: Visit your dentist regularly for preventative care. You can wait on cosmetic and elective work during pregnancy. The importance of a healthy diet and good cleaning to prevent gum problems and decay are paramount.

Final thoughts:

Always be sure to tell your dentist that you're pregnant and how far along you are. Have regular checkups and take care of problems when they are small so that they do not get worse. Practice good oral hygiene and watch your diet and food cravings. Your teeth and gums not only can affect you but your baby. Schedule a dental appointment immediately if: Your gums bleed a lot or are painful. If you have any pain or break any teeth. If you notice any loose teeth or anything out of the ordinary.