

ORAL HEALTH DURING PREGNANCY

- baby on board; extra care needed

Pregnancy is a special time. How you look after your teeth and gums can affect your baby's health as well as you own.

Old wives' tales have linked pregnancy and poor dental health – for example, “you lose a tooth for each child”. Calcium for the baby is not “borrowed or stolen” from the mother's bones and teeth. However, recent research has shown that pregnancy does caused changes in the mouth that may put your oral health at risk.

Pregnancy hormones

- Change the blood supply to your gums, and when plaque is present can cause pregnancy gingivitis – swollen red gums that bleed easily when brushing and may be tender

Morning sickness and some food cravings may cause:

- Increased acid attack
- Increased risk of dental decay

Dental visits and pregnancy

A dental visit before you plan to become pregnant is crucial, so that any decay or other problems can be treated beforehand. A dental check-up early in your pregnancy will help you to make sure that your oral health is at its best. Untreated dental disease can lead to pain, infections and unnecessary exposure to medications, any of which could harm the developing foetus. Poor oral health can also affect the nutritional intake of expectant mothers, which is essential for foetal growth and survival.

Be sure to tell your dentist that you are pregnant. Routine dental treatment can be performed safely at any time during pregnancy.



Figure 1: Healthy teeth and gums



Figure 2: Pregnancy gingivitis

It is important to maintain good oral health during pregnancy:

- To prevent the development of gum diseases
- To decrease decay-causing bacteria in your mouth – you will be less likely to pass on these bacteria to your child. Your child will be less likely to suffer early childhood decay.

Quit smoking

Smoking affects your whole body including your mouth

- **and your baby's health will suffer too.**

Help to stop smoking can be found at

www.quitnow.info.au or phone the **Quitline 131 848**



Tooth decay

- ***your risk may increase during pregnancy***

- Morning sickness (usually during the second to fourth month) frequently causes nausea and vomiting
- After vomiting:
 - rinse your mouth immediately with a mixture of a teaspoon of baking soda dissolved in a cup of water
 - smear a little bit of toothpaste over your teeth with your finger

- don't brush your teeth while the enamel surface is softened by the gastric acid; wait for 30 minutes until the tooth surface recovers, and rinse with baking soda water before brushing
- Frequent snacks and soft drinks/carbonated drinks to alleviate nausea, and cravings for particular foods (often sweet and sticky) can increase your risk of decay
- 'Spit don't rinse' after brushing
- Clean teeth with toothpaste twice daily, and floss at least once at night before brushing

Gum disease – gingivitis and periodontitis

Pregnant women are more likely to develop **gingivitis**, (gum bleeds while brushing) due to pregnancy hormones affecting the way that gums react to plaque. Gingivitis affects up to 70% of pregnant women.

Meticulous care to brush every tooth, with special attention to gently clean away plaque along the gum line is necessary

Periodontitis is a more severe form of gum disease and there is loss of tissues and bone that hold the teeth firm. Smokers and people with diabetes are more likely to get periodontitis. It is also affected by pregnancy hormones.

Severe periodontitis may increase the risk of:

- Premature (preterm) births and low birth weight
- Pre-eclampsia (toxaemia)
- Pregnancy diabetes (gestational diabetes)



Figure 3: Pregnancy tumour (pyogenic granuloma) is rare but may be painful

Your Pregnancy Checklist

- ☑ **Brush AT LEAST twice a day** with toothpaste and a soft brush
- ☑ **Floss at least once a day** before brushing at night
- ☑ QUIT smoking
- ☑ Drink water
- ☑ Have a healthy diet; snack wisely
- ☑ Avoid soft drinks and sugary/sticky snacks
- ☑ After vomiting rinse your mouth with baking soda water immediately but delay brushing for 30 minutes
- ☑ See your dentist before planning to get pregnant to get your teeth and gums checked
- ☑ Fluoride supplement are not recommended in pregnancy
- ☑ An electric toothbrush may improve plaque removal and help to keep your gums healthy

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