

Pregnancy

Separating fact from fiction

During pregnancy you're bombarded with information and it's easy to get overloaded. If this is your first child you're probably being subjected to advice and helpful hints from everyone you know!

When choosing which advice to follow, the health of you and your baby should be the most important considerations. They are intrinsically linked, which means if you ignore your oral health and the ways in which it changes during pregnancy, it could be harmful to your baby.

Just like the rest of your body, your teeth, gums and mouth are affected by hormonal changes during pregnancy. It's important not only to maintain a good oral health routine, but make sure that you are aware of the changes that can cause irreversible damage to your teeth if not properly managed.

Maintaining your oral health

Hormonal changes during pregnancy impact your oral health. Your dentist should join be on the list of health professionals whom you consult regularly, alongside your GP and obstetrician. Hormones will mean your gums are more susceptible to inflammation and infection so regular check-ups and professional cleanings are a must, as is a consistent twice daily routine of brushing with fluoridated toothpaste and once-a-day flossing.

Changes in your oral health

You may find that your gums are more swollen and sensitive during pregnancy; they might bleed and can be quite painful to brush and floss. This is known as 'pregnancy gingivitis' and is a result of changes in hormones that make gums more sensitive to the bacteria found in plaque. Bleeding while brushing and flossing due to increased sensitivity of the gums should not stop you from taking care of your oral health. If you're having difficulty, consult your dentist who can suggest alternate preventive care.

You might also develop what are called "pregnancy tumours" (pyogenic granulomas), which are red, lumpy lesions that appear along the gumline and between the teeth. They're quite harmless, resembling red, raw mulberries, and usually go away once you've had your baby. Your dentist can provide treatment options if they become difficult to manage.

Dealing with food cravings

Some women experience unusual food cravings during pregnancy. Succumbing to these cravings will happen now and then, so it is

important to be mindful that a regular desire for sugary snacks may increase your risk of tooth decay. If nothing but sweetness will satisfy your craving, try to choose healthier options such as fresh fruits with natural or Greek yoghurt.

Be careful of morning sickness

Morning sickness is beyond your control but it's important you know that vomit is extremely acidic and can cause irreversible damage to your teeth, known as dental erosion. This makes your teeth more susceptible to sensitivity and can accelerate decay. No matter how much you might want to, don't brush your teeth for at least one hour after vomiting.

Instead, try rinsing your mouth a couple of times with a solution of ¼ teaspoon of baking soda mixed into 1 cup of warm water, chew sugar-free gum or eat an acid-neutralising food such as milk, cheese or yoghurt. You can even smear a small amount of fluoridated toothpaste on your teeth which gives you additional protection and improves the taste in your mouth.

Don't avoid your dentist

It might seem like a good idea to delay dental treatment while you are pregnant because of a perceived risk to your baby. However, routine and urgent dental procedures can be undertaken throughout your pregnancy and you should be seeing your dentist on a regular basis.

Having a healthy mouth before you plan to become pregnant is the best way to continue easy dental visits through your pregnancy. Having a healthy mouth is also linked to your child having good oral health.

Dental X-rays during pregnancy

There are many myths surrounding dental X-rays, but the truth is you are exposed to far more radiation on a single domestic plane flight than from a dental X-ray. Health professionals take every precaution to minimise radiation. During pregnancy, if an X-ray is a part of your routine check-up, your dentist may recommend waiting until after the birth of your child. However, if an X-ray is required to assist in diagnosing a serious dental condition such as an infection or trauma, your dentist may recommend an X-ray and will use a lead apron to cover your abdomen, minimising your baby's exposure.

For more information on your dental health visit ada.org.au

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