

Going to the Dentist While Pregnant

Carrying a child affects your entire body — and that goes for your mouth, too.

Since your teeth and gums can be affected by the hormonal changes that take place during pregnancy, you'll need to pay special attention to your dental health when you're pregnant.

In addition, there are a few extra safety measures you will need to be sure are followed when going to the dentist. Here's how to stay on top of your dental care when you're expecting.

How Pregnancy Affects Your Dental Health

Problems that women may experience with their teeth and mouth during pregnancy include:

Pregnancy gingivitis. Increased levels of the hormone progesterone can result in gingivitis, an inflammation of the gums. This, along with pregnancy-related changes in your immune system, can cause your gums to become red and swollen, and you may experience bleeding when you brush or floss your teeth. Symptoms of pregnancy gingivitis usually go away after the baby is born.

Periodontal disease. Some pregnant women experience a more serious dental condition, called periodontal, or gum disease. Periodontal disease occurs when a bacterial infection develops in pockets below the gum line, which can damage the fibers that hold your teeth in place. Periodontal disease can also affect the health of the baby, since women with periodontal disease are at higher risk of having babies early and with lower birth weights.

Pregnancy granuloma. A pregnancy granuloma is a red growth that usually appears along the upper line of your gums. This nodular growth bleeds easily and sometimes crusts over. While these growths are not dangerous, they can be uncomfortable and affect the way you speak and eat. Pregnancy granulomas

usually occur in the second trimester and affect 2 to 10 percent of pregnant women. They usually go away after the baby is born.

Dry mouth. Many pregnant women experience dryness in their mouth caused by a decrease in saliva, which can be brought on by hormonal changes. Dry mouth can increase the risk of many dental problems. Chewing sugarless gum can help.

Erosion of tooth enamel. Vomiting due to morning sickness can lead to erosion of the enamel on the back of your front teeth. This is more likely to occur with frequent vomiting over a long period of time.

Dental Care During Pregnancy

Since changes in oral health are common during pregnancy, you should pay special attention to dental care while you're pregnant. To maintain good dental care during pregnancy, follow these guidelines:

Eat a healthful diet. Eating plenty of foods rich in protein, calcium, and vitamins to help support the health of your baby, as well as protect your teeth.

Brush regularly. You should brush your teeth with fluoride toothpaste at least two times a day, making sure you brush for at least two minutes.

Don't forget to floss. Flossing at least one time every day can help prevent or minimize pregnancy gingivitis.

Use mouthwash. Rinsing with an antimicrobial mouthwash can help control the bacteria that contribute to gingivitis.

Visit your dentist. See your dentist for regular dental care while you're pregnant.

Special Dental Considerations for Pregnant Women

It is important to continue going to the dentist while you're pregnant and to follow your regular dental care schedule; and there are certain things you need to do to protect the health of your unborn baby:

Tell your dentist you're pregnant. No matter how far along you are, make sure that your dentist knows you're pregnant. That way, if X-rays, sedatives, or other medications are being considered, your dentist can weigh their risks to your unborn baby.

Avoid major procedures when possible. If you need to have

major work performed on your teeth or mouth, it's best to wait until your baby is born to have these procedures done, if possible. However, if you have periodontal disease, you may benefit from a special kind of cleaning called scaling and root planing, which cleans the infected areas beneath the gums and around the roots of your teeth.

Plan your dental visit carefully. It's ideal to see your dentist during your second trimester, since your baby is more vulnerable during the first and third trimesters, when major development is occurring (first trimester) and the risk of premature delivery increases (late third trimester).

Ask questions. If you have any concerns or questions about the safety of a dental procedure, share them with your dentist. Also, discuss your concerns with your obstetrician-gynecologist or pregnancy health care provider. They can offer reassurance to you that what is being done is safe for your baby.