

Tips to Maintain Oral Health During Pregnancy

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The "old wives" tale of "a tooth for every pregnancy" was based on misconceptions that dental health problems during pregnancy were to be expected and not preventable. Even though hormonal changes are occurring,

making the pregnant woman more at risk of developing pregnancy gingivitis, a mouth that is clean (low plaque build-up) is less likely to develop pregnancy gingivitis and its complications.

According to many studies, as many as 75 percent of women are affected by gingivitis during their pregnancies. Gingivitis (commonly known as the first stage of gum disease or inflamed gums), is caused by plaque build-up on the teeth and below the gum line, which can also be aggravated by fluctuating hormones. The hormone shifts in pregnancy can reduce the gums resistance to infections well as help promote the growth of certain bacteria and plaque. The rising hormone levels that accompany pregnancy can also irritate gums already battling plaque build-up. This condition can be uncomfortable and cause swelling, bleeding, redness or tenderness in the gum tissue. Conversely, as it progresses to a condition called periodontal disease (a serious gum infection that affects the supporting bone that hold teeth in the mouth) may affect the health of your baby. In fact, pregnant women with periodontal disease may be seven times more likely to have a baby that's born too early and too small. In addition, many studies say that pregnant women with gum disease may be more likely to develop gestational diabetes, a condition in which women without previously diagnosed diabetes exhibit high blood sugar levels during pregnancy. Children born to mothers with this condition may have "excessive birth weight", associated with higher rates of compli-

cations during delivery including caesarian deliveries. This poses a risk of trauma to both mother and baby during the delivery. These babies also have a higher risk of dangerously low blood sugar levels after birth (hypoglycemia) and excess levels of insulin in the blood (hyperinsulinemia). They are also at higher risk for potential long-term obesity and sugar intolerance. Good oral health habits are an important part of a healthy lifestyle. If you are planning a pregnancy, schedule a dental checkup for a cleaning. If you are pregnant, continue your regular dental visits. Be sure to inform your dentist if you are pregnant or suspect you might be pregnant.

Additionally, pregnant women are at greater risk for tooth decay when sugary food cravings kick in and constant snacking on sugary food and beverages can lead to a buildup of dental plaque. Refining your oral hygiene during pregnancy is one of the most important steps you can take to help yourself and your baby. Routine home care is the best medicine for the prevention of dental diseases. A thorough regimen, including brushing twice a day with fluoridated toothpaste and flossing once daily, must be followed. Using an antibacterial mouth rinse can also be beneficial. Good oral health habits are not only valuable during pregnancy but after pregnancy as well because cavity-causing bacteria can be passed from mother to child through contact such as sharing utensils or kissing. All expectant mothers should receive preventative dental care as part of their total obstetrical health program.

What about other regular dental work during pregnancy?

Dental work such as cavity fillings and crowns should be treated to reduce the chance of infection. If dental work is done during pregnancy, the second trimester is ideal. Once you reach the third trimester, it may be very difficult to lie on your back for an extended period of time.

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The safest course of action is to postpone all unnecessary dental work until after the birth. However, sometimes emergency dental work such as a root canal or tooth extraction is necessary. Digital X-rays offer up to 95% less radiation than traditional X-rays. Many dental offices are now offering them Elective treatments, such as teeth whitening and other cosmetic procedures, should be postponed until after the birth. It is best to avoid exposing the developing baby to any risks, even if they are minimal.

As health care providers, your dentist will recommend the following tips for maintaining proper oral hygiene during pregnancy:

Inform Your Dentist: X-Rays can harm the baby, and medications you may be on can affect the treatment your dentist administers.

Clean Where the Toothbrush Doesn't: Make flossing and the use of an aid like a Waterpik or similar irrigation device a regular part of your daily oral hygiene regimen.

Utilize Proper Brushing Technique: Brush

twice a day for at least two minutes, preferably with an electric toothbrush, using fluoride toothpaste to prevent cavities.

Increase Time Spent on Oral Care: This means brushing after every meal if possible or at least rinsing your mouth out with water if a toothbrush is not available.

Eat Well: A well-balanced diet will not only give your unborn baby nutrients, it will help keep your teeth and gums healthy.

Perfect Posture: Maintain healthy circulation by keeping your legs uncrossed while you sit in the dentist's chair and take a pillow to help keep you and the baby more comfortable .

Visit Your Dentist: Consider more frequent visits (every 3 months) to the dentist during pregnancy, so the risk of pregnancy gingivitis (gum inflammation) can be decreased through early detection and treatment. At the very least, regular 6-month checkups during pregnancy are a must !!!

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those seen in young adults - thus bolstering libido. Men typically use 1,500 to 6,000 mg or more per day in three divided doses. A teaspoon of root powder, containing 2,800 mg of maca root, is used in 8 ounces (227 ml) of water three times daily. Maca increases seminal volume, count of mobile sperm and mobility of sperm by up to 200%. It also increases the levels of DHEA which, in turn, increases the levels of testosterone.

Saw palmetto (*Serenoa repens*) is a very popular herb known for its ability to reverse an enlarged prostate gland (benign prostatic hyper trophy or BPH). About 60 per cent of all men over age 50 suffer from varying degrees of prostate enlargement, which can interfere with normal sexual function. Saw palmetto can be instrumental in reversing this situation. It works by preventing testosterone from converting to dihydrotestosterone, the form of testosterone thought to stimulate prostate enlargement. The recommended daily dose is 1 to 2 grams of whole berries or 320 mg of a standardized extract.

Other natural remedies that support libido and fertility are zinc, vitamin C, vitamin E, selenium, niacin, ginkgo biloba extract, panax gin-

seng, gokhru fruit (*Tribulus terrestris*), damiana leaf, gotu cola and velvet elk antler. To read more about these, see my book *Boosting Male Libido Naturally* (Alive Books, 2000), available at your favorite health food store.

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