



Pregnancy & Oral Health

This handout explains how pregnancy affects oral health and offers practical tips to help protect the teeth and gums of both mother and baby.



General Information

Preventing oral health issues during pregnancy helps both the mother and baby. Oral health is the health of your mouth, teeth, gums, and tongue. During pregnancy, some changes can cause new dental problems or make existing ones worse. For example, gingivitis is common and causes gums to get red, swollen, and bleed easily when brushing. Some oral health issues are linked to pregnancy complications and can be passed on to the baby.

Common Challenges and How to Protect Teeth

Pregnancy symptoms can make oral care more difficult. The following sections explain common problems and ways to protect your teeth.







Challenge: Frequent nausea and vomiting (morning sickness)

Many women have nausea and vomiting during the first trimester. Vomiting leaves stomach acid in the mouth. This acid can weaken the outer layer of the teeth, called enamel. Weak enamel can lead to tooth erosion and tooth decay. Some people snack often or drink sugary drinks to help with nausea.



Recommendation:

-  **Food choices:** Try sugar-free gum or lozenges for nausea relief. Avoid products with sugar. Look for the word “sucrose” on the label. If you snack often, choose foods low in sugar and carbohydrates.
-  **Mouth rinse:** Do not brush right after vomiting. Brushing too soon can damage weakened enamel. Instead of brushing immediately, rinse your mouth with water mixed with one teaspoon of baking soda to help neutralize the acid. Rinsing with this mixture after vomiting helps to reduce acid in the mouth.

Challenge: Difficult to maintain daily brushing and flossing

Fatigue, nausea, and vomiting can make brushing and flossing harder during pregnancy. When teeth are not cleaned well, plaque can build up. This can increase the risk of tooth decay and gum disease. When plaque is not removed by brushing and flossing, bacteria can build up and cause cavities or irritate gums. Hormonal changes during pregnancy can also increase the risk of gingivitis. This is more common during the 2nd and 3rd trimesters.

Recommendation:


-  **Daily brushing and flossing:** Try to brush and floss twice a day, especially before bedtime.
-  **Routine dental visits:** Dental care is safe during pregnancy. Regular checkups help prevent and treat problems early. It is better for mothers and babies to receive dental care than to suffer from oral health issues.



Challenge: Mouth dryness

Some pregnant women develop dry mouth from hormonal changes. This happens when the mouth makes less saliva. Saliva helps protect teeth and gums. Dry mouth can make tooth decay and gum disease worse.

Recommendation:


 **Hydration:** Drink water often during the day. Chew sugar-free gum to help increase saliva.



Challenge: Craving carbohydrate-rich foods

Pregnancy may cause cravings for sweets or foods high in carbohydrates. Eating these foods often increases the risk of tooth decay.

Recommendation:


 **Dessert vs. snacking:** Eat sugary foods with meals instead of between meals. This gives sugar less time to damage teeth.



Challenge: Fear of seeking dental treatment during pregnancy




Understandably, new parents are cautious about their baby's safety and choices they make during pregnancy. Many women may avoid dental treatment during pregnancy, but dental care during pregnancy is both safe and important. Untreated cavities and gum disease can cause pain, infection, and other health problems. Gum disease has been shown to increase the risk of pregnancy complications like preterm birth, low birthweight, and pre-eclampsia. Mothers with cavities can also pass cavity-causing bacteria to their babies. Bacteria transfer from mother to baby has shown to increase the risk of children getting cavities as they get older.

Recommendation:

 **Prevention and timely treatment:** Visit your dentist for a checkup during pregnancy. Tell the dental team that you are pregnant. Studies show that dental cleaning, x-rays, and treatments with tooth numbing are safe during pregnancy. It is important to receive any needed treatment to relieve pain and discomfort. Talk to your dental professionals (dentists and hygienists) about your concerns. Your dentist can also help you make a plan to keep your mouth healthy during pregnancy.

Substance Use and Oral Health


There are other factors that can harm dental health. Substances like alcohol, nicotine, marijuana, and opioids can cause poor oral health. Substance use can also reduce saliva and increase bacteria and tooth decay.


-  With less saliva and more bacteria, pregnant women increase their risk for developing oral health issues.
-  Using substances also increases the chance of grinding your teeth and causing permanent damage.
-  Using substances while pregnant can harm the baby and worsen oral health for both mother and baby.


Quick Tips


 Brush and floss twice a day with fluoride toothpaste.

 Rinse the mouth with baking soda and water after vomiting to reduce stomach acid.

 Drink plenty of water during the day to help wash away bacteria. Drinking tap water with fluoride helps strengthen and protect teeth.

 Practice mindful snacking; have sugary foods or drinks with your meal, not between mealtimes.

 Visit your dentist and tell them you are pregnant! They can tell you about dental treatments and care that are safe during pregnancy.

 If you are sensitive to smells and tastes, ask your dentist about mild-tasting oral care products.



Resources

American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry. Oral health care for the pregnant pediatric dental patient. The Reference Manual of Pediatric Dentistry. Chicago, IL; American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry; 2025:354-63

Oral Health Care During Pregnancy Expert Workgroup. 2012. Oral Health Care During Pregnancy: A National Consensus Statement—Summary of an Expert Workgroup Meeting. Washington, DC: National Maternal and Child Oral Health Resource Center.

West Virginia Dental Clinics - Free and Sliding Scale:

<https://adwprogram.wv.gov/media/23847/download?inline>



Further Reading - AAPA Oral Health Care During Pregnancy:

<https://aapa.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/OralHealthPregnancyConsensus.pdf>



Learn more about IMPACT WV's services for mothers and infants:

<https://impact.cedwvu.org/>

