



Why is oral health important during pregnancy?

- Oral health should be a routine part of prenatal care. Poor oral health can lead to poor health outcomes for the mother and her baby.
- Up to 75% of women develop gingivitis (inflammation of the gum tissue) during pregnancy due primarily to hormonal changes. Left unchecked, gingivitis can progress to periodontal disease (an infection of the gums and bone surrounding the teeth), which affects up to 40% of all pregnant women.
- Treating periodontal disease during pregnancy is effective in reducing the number of pathogenic bacteria in the mouth and leads to improved overall health.
- Pregnant women may be at higher risk for tooth decay due to changes in eating habits, frequent bouts of morning sickness, and possibly less attention paid to their oral hygiene practices.
- Pregnant women with high levels of decay-causing bacteria can transmit these bacteria to the mouth of their child, predisposing the child to many cavities.

What can you do to help your patient have good oral health during pregnancy?

Ask your patient these three questions:

1. Do you have swollen or bleeding gums, a toothache (pain), problems eating or chewing food, or other problems in your mouth?
 2. When was your last dental visit?
 3. Do you need help finding a dentist?
- Provide anticipatory guidance on how to care for the mouth.
 - Check the patient's mouth for obvious signs of oral disease (e.g., cavities, infection, bleeding gums).
 - Refer to a dentist (using a referral form) and help patients get dental care, particularly those who don't have dental insurance or can't afford to pay for care.
 - Brushing after vomiting can cause enamel loss. Instead, advise the patient to rinse with 1 teaspoon of baking soda mixed with 1 cup of water and wait an hour after vomiting to brush.

Is it safe to get dental care during pregnancy?

- Oral health care is safe throughout pregnancy. Delaying treatment can lead to more serious problems.
- Dental X-rays can be safely taken anytime during pregnancy with appropriate shielding.

Helpful Resources:

Oral Health Care During Pregnancy, Maryland Department of Health, 2022.

<https://health.maryland.gov/phpa/oralhealth/Documents/PregnancyGuidanceDocument.pdf>

Comprehensive practice guidelines for prenatal and oral health providers. Includes photos and explanations of common oral health conditions during pregnancy and pharmacological considerations.

Smiles for Life — A National Oral Health Curriculum, Society of Teachers of Family Medicine Group on Oral Health, 2018.

<https://www.smilesforlifeoralhealth.org/courses/pregnancy-and-women/>

Nationally recognized curriculum containing seven modules, including a module on pregnancy and oral health. Continuing educational credits are offered.

Perinatal Oral Health Assessment Form, MaineHealth, 2017.

<https://www.mchoralhealth.org/PDFs/38355.pdf>

Assessment form for documenting oral health status. Includes photos of common oral health conditions seen during pregnancy.

Oral Health Care During Pregnancy: A National Consensus Statement, National Maternal and Child Health Resource Center, 2012.

<https://www.mchoralhealth.org/PDFs/OralHealthPregnancyConsensus.pdf>

Consensus statement developed by the Health Resources and Services Administration, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, and the American Dental Association. This site also provides updates of various state and national activities.

Oral Health Care During Pregnancy and Through the Lifespan, Committee Opinion Number 569. American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, 2013 (reaffirmed 2017).

https://www.acog.org/clinical/clinical-guidance/committee-opinion/articles/2013/08/oral-health-care-during-pregnancy-and-through-the-lifespan?utm_source=redirect&utm_medium=web&utm_campaign=otn

Oral Health Care during Pregnancy and Early Childhood: Practice Guidelines, New York State Department of Health, 2006.

<https://www.health.ny.gov/publications/0824.pdf>

Comprehensive background on oral health and pregnancy and practice guidelines, including a sample dental referral form.

Why Oral Health Matters for Pregnant Women and Fact Sheets and Other Tools to Raise Awareness, Children's Dental Health Project.

<http://www.endcavities.org/during-pregnancy/> and <http://www.endcavities.org/resources/>

Website offering a fact sheet (with citations) on oral health and pregnancy, a patient education video, and sample social media messages.

Oral Health Care During Pregnancy: A Resource Guide, Third Edition, National Maternal and Child Oral Health Resource Center, 2020.

<https://www.mchoralhealth.org/PDFs/oralhealthpregnancyresguide.pdf>

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