

PREGNANCY

Is there a connection between my diet pregnancy and my oral health?

Eating a balanced diet is necessary to provide the correct amounts of nutrients to nourish both you and your child. What you eat during the nine months of pregnancy affects the development of your unborn child -- including teeth. Your baby's teeth begin to develop between the third and sixth month of pregnancy, so it is important that you receive sufficient amounts of nutrients -- especially calcium, protein, phosphorous, and vitamins A, C, and D.

Does a woman lose calcium from her teeth during pregnancy?

It is a myth that calcium is lost from the mother's teeth during pregnancy. The calcium your baby needs is provided by your diet, not by your teeth. If dietary calcium is inadequate, however, your body will provide this mineral from stores in your bones. An adequate intake of dairy products -- the primary source of calcium -- or the supplements your obstetrician may recommend will help ensure that you get all the calcium you need during your pregnancy.

What if I'm hungry between meals?

During pregnancy, many women have the desire to eat between meals. While this is a normal urge, frequent snacking on carbohydrate-containing foods can be an invitation to tooth decay. The decay process begins with plaque, an invisible, sticky layer of harmful bacteria that constantly forms on teeth. The bacteria convert sugar and starch that remain in the mouth to acid that attacks tooth enamel. The longer sugars are retained in your mouth, the longer the acids attack. After repeated attacks, tooth decay can result. Eat nutritious, well-balanced meals made up of foods from the five major food groups: breads, cereals and other grains; fruits; vegetables; meat, fish, poultry and protein alternates; and milk, yogurt and cheese. Try to resist the urge to snack constantly. When you need a snack, choose foods that are nutritious for you and your baby such as raw fruits and vegetables and dairy products. Following your physician's advice regarding diet is your wisest course.

What if I'm pregnant and need a dental radiograph examination?

A radiograph may be needed for dental treatment or a dental emergency that can't wait until after the baby is born. Untreated dental infections can pose a risk to the fetus, and dental treatment may be necessary to maintain the health of the mother and child. Radiation from dental X-rays is extremely low. However, every precaution is taken to minimize radiation exposure. A leaded apron minimizes exposure to the abdomen and should be used when any dental radiograph is taken. A leaded thyroid collar can protect the thyroid from radiation, and should be used whenever possible. The use of a leaded thyroid collar is strongly recommended for women of childbearing age, pregnant women and children. Dental radiographs are not contraindicated if one is trying to become pregnant or is breast feeding.

Does pregnancy affect my gums?

During pregnancy, your body's hormone levels rise considerably. Gingivitis, especially common during the second to eighth months of pregnancy, may cause red, puffy or tender gums that tend to bleed when you brush. This sensitivity is an exaggerated response to plaque and is caused by an increased level of progesterone in your system. Your dentist may recommend more frequent cleanings during your second trimester or early third trimester to help you avoid problems.

What are "pregnancy tumors"?

Occasionally overgrowths of gum tissue, called "pregnancy tumors," appear on the gums during the second trimester. These localized growths or swellings are usually found between the teeth and are believed to be related to excess plaque. They bleed easily and are characterized by a red, raw-looking mulberry-like surface. They are often surgically removed after the baby is born. If you experience pregnancy tumors, see your dentist. It's especially important, then, to maintain good oral health during pregnancy. Studies indicate that pregnant women who have severe periodontal (gum) disease may be at increased risk for pre-term delivery, which in turn increases the risk of having a low-birthweight baby. If you notice any changes in your mouth during pregnancy, see your dentist.

What can I do to keep my mouth healthy during pregnancy?

To help prevent tooth decay and periodontal disease, brush your teeth thoroughly twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste to remove plaque. Be sure to clean between your teeth daily with floss or interdental cleaners. Ask your dentist or hygienist to show you how to brush and floss correctly. When choosing oral care products, look for those that display the American Dental Association's Seal of Acceptance, your assurance that they have met ADA standards of safety and effectiveness.

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