

Pregnancy and Dental Health

Your baby's mouth and teeth begin to form within the first few weeks of pregnancy.

Taking good care of yourself during pregnancy affects the dental health of your baby.

Taking care of your dental health

It is especially important to take care of your dental health during pregnancy. Some of the reasons for taking special care include:

- Tooth decay is caused by bacteria in the mouth and is passed from mother to child through saliva.
- Hormonal changes occur during pregnancy that can affect the gums. The gums may become swollen and inflamed in response to bacteria along the gum line.
- Tooth decay is affected by what you eat, how often you eat, and how long the food stays in your mouth or on teeth. Snacking may be necessary, but be aware that the frequency of eating sweet or sticky foods increases the risk of tooth decay.
- Nausea and vomiting can occur during pregnancy. Frequent vomiting can leave stomach acids in your mouth. If this acid is not cleared away quickly, it can damage the surfaces of your teeth and cause tooth decay.

To keep your teeth and gums healthy:

- Brush your teeth at least twice a day with a toothpaste that contains fluoride, taking extra care to clean carefully along the gum lines and to floss daily.
- Eat a variety of healthy foods.
- Limit foods that are sweet or stick to your teeth, which increase the risk of tooth decay.
- Do not brush your teeth for 30 minutes after vomiting. The stomach acid combined with brushing may erode the tooth enamel. Rinse your mouth with water, or use a fluoride mouth rinse to freshen your mouth and protect your teeth.
- Avoid smoking and drinking alcohol during pregnancy.

Professional dental care

It is important to have regular dental visits during your pregnancy. *Tooth decay is caused by bacteria in the mouth that are passed onto the baby from parents. If you have healthy teeth, you will have less tooth decay bacteria and lower the risk of passing bacteria onto your baby.*

Regular dental cleanings and checkups can be done safely at any time during your pregnancy. Be sure to tell your dentist or dental hygienist that you are pregnant.

Any pain, swelling or infection in your mouth should be treated immediately because this can affect your health *and* your baby's health.

Are x-rays safe?

If you are pregnant, you can postpone routine dental x-rays until after your baby is born in order to prevent or reduce radiation exposure. If x-rays are needed, the lead apron used at the dental office will shield you and your baby.

Are local anesthetics and medicines safe?

It is wise to avoid taking drugs or medications of any kind while you are pregnant. However, if you need emergency dental treatment, certain drugs may be required. If you have any concerns, you should discuss their use with your dentist and physician.

For more information on pregnancy and dental health, please contact your dentist or dental hygienist, or the dental program at your local public health unit.

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- In Greater Vancouver, call 604-215-4700
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