



## Pregnancy and Dental Health

### Why is dental health during pregnancy important?

It is important to take care of your teeth and gums during pregnancy for the following reasons:

- Hormonal changes during pregnancy can affect your gums causing them to become more sensitive, swollen and red. This is called “pregnancy gingivitis” or gum disease.
- Gingivitis can lead to more serious periodontal (gum and bone) disease without good oral care.
- Poor dental health may affect the health of your developing baby. Research shows there may be a link between periodontal disease and having a pre-term or low-birth weight baby. These babies are at greater risk of having developmental problems, asthma, ear infections, and may have a higher risk of infant death.

### How can I keep my teeth and gums healthy?

Your teeth can be affected by what you eat and drink, how often you eat and drink, how long the food stays on your teeth, as well as how long plaque is left on your teeth. Plaque is the sticky film that contains bacteria.

To keep your teeth and gums healthy:

- Brush your teeth at least twice a day with toothpaste that contains fluoride.
- Clean carefully along the gum line where plaque sticks.
- Floss your teeth every day before bedtime.

- Choose to drink water between meals and snacks. Avoid frequent sipping on sweet liquids.
- Brush your teeth after meals and snacks. If this is not possible, rinse your mouth with water or a fluoride mouth rinse.
- Eat healthy foods and limit foods that are sweet or stick to your teeth. If you eat sweets occasionally, try to eat them at mealtime.
- Do not smoke or drink alcohol during pregnancy.

Nausea and vomiting during pregnancy can leave stomach acids in your mouth. Do not brush your teeth for 30 minutes after vomiting. The stomach acid combined with brushing may erode your tooth enamel. Rinse your mouth with water, or mix a teaspoon of baking soda with water. You can also use a fluoride mouth rinse to freshen your mouth and protect your teeth.

### Should I see a dentist while I am pregnant?

Caring for your teeth and gums during pregnancy is an important part of having a healthy pregnancy.

Regular dental cleanings and check-ups are safe at any time during 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 right away to keep you and your baby healthy.

## Are x-rays, local anesthetics and medications safe?

Dental x-rays and local anesthetics for dental treatment can be safely provided during pregnancy. If x-rays are required, the lead apron used at the dental office will protect you and your baby.

Some medications may not be safe to use during pregnancy. Check with your pharmacist, dentist and/or health care provider to see whether a medication is safe during pregnancy. If you need emergency dental care, certain drugs may be required, so it is important that your dental office knows that you are pregnant.

## How Do I Keep My Baby's Teeth Healthy?

Your baby's teeth are fully formed before they are born, but are not visible as the gums cover them. You can help your baby to develop strong teeth and bones by eating healthy foods during pregnancy and getting enough calcium and vitamin D.

After your baby is born, it is important to continue to take care of your dental health.

Bacteria that causes tooth decay may be passed to your child through saliva.

To prevent passing bacteria to your baby's mouth:

- Brush and floss your teeth every day.
- Use a different spoon to test your baby's food, and avoid sharing toothbrushes.
- If you have chosen to use a pacifier, clean it with soap and water instead of your mouth.
- Visit the dentist at least twice a year.

## For More Information

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

For more information about dental care for your baby, see [HealthLinkBC File #19 Dental Care for Your Infant and Toddler](#).