

Smilematters

PATIENT FACT SHEET

Pregnancy and Your Oral Health

Expectant mothers may have special risks related to their oral health care and that of their unborn child. Your baby's teeth begin to develop as early as the third month of pregnancy, so it's important to make sure you and your baby receive the proper nutrients to ensure healthy development. Be aware of potential complications, and notify your dentist of any changes you may notice in your mouth.

Common Oral Health Problems Associated with Pregnancy

Tooth decay — May arise from frequent snacking, which exposes teeth to harmful sugars and acids over long periods of time. Choose healthy snacks, such as raw fruits and vegetables and dairy products, and follow your physician's advice.

Periodontal (gum) disease — Increased levels of progesterone in your body during pregnancy may lead to red, puffy or tender gums that may also bleed when you brush. These problems are especially common during the second to eighth months of pregnancy and are an exaggerated response to plaque. More-frequent dental office cleanings during the second and third trimesters of your pregnancy may help you avoid problems.

Pregnancy "tumors" — Overgrowths of gum tissue may appear during the second trimester. These may appear as red, raw-looking swellings between teeth that bleed easily. They are often surgically removed after the baby is born.

Pre-term birth/low birth weight — Women with severe periodontal disease may be at increased risk for pre-term birth, resulting in low birth weight.

Preventing Problems

Good oral hygiene and regular dental visits are important to preventing problems, especially during pregnancy. Brushing twice a day with fluoride toothpaste and flossing once a day helps remove decay-causing plaque, which may be

elevated due to high hormone levels.

A healthy diet can provide you and your baby with the nutrients you both need to maintain good oral health throughout pregnancy and development. The nutrients especially important to the development of your baby's teeth include calcium, protein, phosphorous, and vitamins A, C, and D.

Keep Your Dentist Up to Date

It's important to let your dentist know you are pregnant and to tell him or her about any changes in your mouth at each dental visit. In order to make informed decisions about your treatment plan, your dentist needs to know:

- if you are experiencing any problems with your pregnancy;
- if you've noticed any changes in your oral health;
- if there have been any other change in your medical history;
- the names of all prescription and over-the-counter drugs you are taking.

Good Communication and Monitoring Is the Key

Keeping your dentist informed about your pregnancy and changes in your mouth will help your dentist provide you with the best care. Be sure to contact your dentist right away if you start experiencing problems such as trouble chewing, bleeding or sore gums, red or swollen gums, or sore or loose teeth. Be sure to see your dentist for a professional cleaning every six months, or more frequently if you are experiencing problems with your oral health.

By practicing good oral hygiene habits and eating a healthy diet, you and your baby can enjoy a healthy body and a healthy mouth!