

Pregnancy and oral health



Dental care is considered safe during pregnancy.^{1,2} Your dentist may work with your obstetrician when planning your treatments, but many decisions can be made without consultation. For example, many medications—including some antibiotics and local anesthetics—can be safely used during pregnancy. X-rays also are considered safe when a protective cover is used over your abdomen and throat.¹

In addition to regular visits to your dentist, you may need to see him or her for problems that might come up during pregnancy, like gum problems or dental erosion.

GUM PROBLEMS

Changes in your hormones during pregnancy may put you at increased risk of some gum problems. For example, your gums may swell or bleed when you are brushing. This form of gum disease is called gingivitis. Some extra effort in caring for your teeth at home may help prevent gingivitis:

- brush twice a day for 2 minutes with a toothpaste that has fluoride;
- clean between your teeth once a day with dental floss or another interdental cleaner.

Left untreated, gingivitis can lead to periodontitis. Periodontitis affects the tissues beneath the gumline that hold your teeth in place. Professional dental care is needed to treat periodontitis. Without treatment, periodontitis can get worse, and you can lose teeth.

Another gum problem that can occur during pregnancy concerns lumps along the gumline. These are generally harmless, but they can make it difficult to keep your teeth clean. They typically go away after the baby is born, but if they cause serious problems for you in taking care of your teeth, your dentist may suggest removing them.

DENTAL EROSION

Some pregnant women experience nausea. If this causes you to vomit, acid in the mouth can increase the risk of dental erosion. Constant exposure to this acid can soften and wear down enamel (the hard outside layer of your teeth). This is called dental erosion. To help reduce the loss of enamel, women should not brush their teeth immediately after vomiting. Instead, they should rinse with a diluted solution of 1 cup water and 1 teaspoon of baking soda to neutralize the acid.³

WHEN TO SCHEDULE YOUR APPOINTMENT

Dental treatment is considered safe at any time during pregnancy, but you might be more comfortable during your second trimester. Nausea and vomiting are more common during the first trimester,⁴ which could make treatment difficult. During the third trimester, the weight of the baby may cause you to be uncomfortable or even lightheaded during treatment.⁵ If so, tell your dentist so he or she may see about making you more comfortable by helping you change positions.

CONCLUSION

Professional dental care is considered safe during pregnancy, can help you maintain good oral health, and manage any problems that may develop. Daily care at home is also an important part of keeping your teeth and gums healthy. ■

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“For the Patient” provides general information on dental treatments. It is designed to prompt discussion between dentist and patient about treatment options and does not substitute for the dentist’s professional assessment based on the individual patient’s needs and desires.

You can find more information for patients at ADAcatalog.org or at MouthHealthy.org.

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