Dental Care in Pregnancy

Why is dental care in pregnancy important?

During pregnancy, you are more likely to have problems with your teeth or gums. If you have an infection in your teeth or gums, the chance of your baby being premature (born early) or having low birth weight may be slightly higher than if your teeth and gums are healthy

What is periodontal disease?

Periodontal disease is an infection in the mouth caused by bacteria. The bacteria use the sugar you eat to make acid. That acid can destroy the enamel (protective) coating on your teeth, which can cause tooth decay (cavities) or even tooth loss. Periodontal disease can begin with gum swelling and bleeding, called gingivitis. If it is not treated, gingivitis can spread from the gums to the bones that support the teeth and to other parts of the mouth. However, your dentist can treat periodontal disease even when you are pregnant.

Why are pregnant women more at risk for periodontal disease?

There are 2 major reasons women can have dental problems during pregnancy:

Pregnancy gingivitis—During pregnancy, changes in hormone levels allow bacteria to grow in the mouth and gums more easily. This makes periodontal disease more common when you are pregnant.

Nausea and vomiting—Pregnant women may have nausea and vomiting or "morning sickness," especially in the first trimester. The stomach acids from vomiting can also break down the enamel coating of the teeth.

Is it safe to visit your dentist in pregnancy?

Dental care is safe during pregnancy and important for the health of you and your baby. Your dentist can help you improve the health of your mouth during pregnancy. Your dentist can also find and treat problems with your teeth and gums.

What should you know before you see the dentist?

- Make sure your dentist knows that you are pregnant. If medications for infection or for pain are needed, your dentist can prescribe ones that are safe for you and your baby.
- Tell your dentist about any changes you have noticed since you became pregnant and about any medications or supplements you are taking.
- Routine x-rays should be avoided in pregnancy, but it may be necessary if there is a problem or an emergency. Your body should be covered with a lead apron to protect you and your baby.
- Dental work can be done safely at any point in pregnancy. If possible, it is best to delay treatments and procedures until after the first trimester.

Tips for Improving Your Dental Health

What to do	Why this helps
Brush your teeth twice a day with a soft-bristled toothbrush. Floss once a day.	Regularly cleaning your teeth helps to prevent plaque buildup, which causes gum disease and tooth decay. Use a soft-bristled toothbrush because your gums are more likely to bleed in pregnancy. This bleeding is common in pregnancy because of the changes in your hormones, your blood vessels, and the amount of blood you have in your body.
Use toothpaste and mouth rinse that contains fluoride.	Fluoride helps to remove plaque and strengthen enamel.
Chew sugarless or xylitol-containing gum 2 to 3 times a day.	Xylitol is a sugar-free sweetener. Unlike sugar, xylitol is not changed into acid by bacteria on the teeth. Chewing gum with xylitol helps to decrease the amount of plaque on your teeth and makes it easier to remove the plaque when brushing.
Rinse your mouth with a teaspoon of baking soda mixed in a cup of water if you vomit or have morning sickness. If possible, try to wait one hour after vomiting before brushing your teeth.	When you vomit, stomach acids come in contact with your teeth. Rinsing with baking soda changes the acids so they do not hurt your teeth. When you brush right after vomiting, it can cause the protective lining of the teeth to wear away.
Limit how much sugar you eat.	Sugar changes to acid and plaque on teeth, which can lead to periodontal disease and tooth decay. When you eat sugary foods often, your teeth are more exposed to damage.
Choose nutritious snacks like raw fruits, vegetables, yogurt, or cheese.	Nutritious foods are healthy for you and your baby and contain less sugar that can damage your teeth.
Drink water or low-fat milk. Avoid beverages that are carbonated or contain a lot of sugar, like soda or juice.	Water or low-fat milk hydrates you and contains little or no sugar.

For More Information

American Dental Association: Pregnancy
http://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/pregnancy/

March of Dimes: Dental Health During Pregnancy
http://www.marchofdimes.com/pregnancy/dental-health-during-pregnancy.aspx

www.sharewithwomen.org

American College of Nurse-Midwives