



Oral Health Messages

PREGNANT WOMEN

A basic guide to help you care for your oral health during your pregnancy:

- 1 Good Nutrition and Oral Health
- 2 Oral Hygiene
- 3 Oral Health Begins at Home
- 3 Going to the Dentist
- 4 Paying for Your Oral Health Care
- 4 What Does Your Dental Plan Cover?
- 5 Choosing the Best Dental Home for Your Needs
- 5 After Your Baby Is Born

More resources

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A child’s dental care really starts with a mother’s healthy pregnancy because baby teeth begin to form before birth. If you are pregnant, make sure to eat a balanced, nutritious diet and get an adequate amount of vitamins and minerals. It’s important for pregnant women to have a complete dental exam and treat any cavities or gum disease.

Good Nutrition and Oral Health

During pregnancy, your oral health habits affect your baby’s teeth which are already developing by the 3rd month of pregnancy. Poor oral health during pregnancy has been associated with premature delivery, intrauterine growth restriction, gestational diabetes and preeclampsia.

What you eat during pregnancy can affect your baby’s development.

- Eat a variety of healthy foods, such as fruits; vegetables; whole-grain products such as cereals, breads or crackers; and dairy products like milk, cheese, cottage cheese or unsweetened yogurt.
- Eat fewer foods high in sugar including candy, cookies, cake, and dried fruit. Choose healthy snacks that are low in sugar such as fruits, vegetables, cheese and unsweetened yogurt.
- Read food labels so you can choose foods lower in sugar.
- If you have trouble with nausea, try eating small amounts of healthy foods throughout the day.
- Drink water or milk instead of beverages that are high in sugar such as juice, fruit-flavored drinks, energy drinks, or soft drinks.
- Eat foods high in folate including: asparagus, broccoli and leafy green vegetables such as lettuce and spinach, legumes (beans, peas, lentils), papaya, tomato juice, oranges or orange juice, strawberries, cantaloupe and bananas.
- Eat whole grain products or grains that have been fortified with folic acid (breads, cereals, cornmeal, flour, pasta, white rice).

Vitamins during pregnancy: It's recommended that any woman who could get pregnant take 400 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid daily, starting before conception and continuing for the first 12 weeks of pregnancy to help cover any nutritional gaps in the mother's diet. Calcium is also important for a pregnant woman to prevent loss of bone density as the growing baby uses calcium for its own bone growth.

Oral Hygiene

Good dental or oral care is important to maintaining healthy teeth, gums and tongue. Oral problems, including bad breath, tooth decay, gum and periodontal diseases are preventable with proper basic care.

Here are some tips that you can follow to maintain good oral hygiene:

- **Toothbrush:** The best toothbrush head allows you to easily access all surfaces of your teeth. For most adults, a toothbrush head that is one-half inch wide and one inch tall will be the easiest to use and the most effective. For the vast majority of people, a soft-bristled toothbrush will be the most comfortable and safest choice. Look for an ADA-recommended toothbrush.
- **Frequency of replacing brushes:** Most dentists agree that toothbrushes should be replaced every 3 months. After 3 months of normal wear, brushes are less effective at removing plaque and reaching those tricky in-between spaces in your teeth. It is also important that you change your toothbrush after a cold, flu or mouth infection. Bacteria can hide within the bristles leading to re-infection.
- **How to store brushes:** It is important to rinse your toothbrush well after each use. Let it dry in an upright position and try to keep it from touching other toothbrushes to avoid passing germs from one brush to another. Use a standard toothbrush

holder with slots for hanging toothbrushes upright. When traveling, you can use a plastic case to prevent toothbrush bristles from damage.

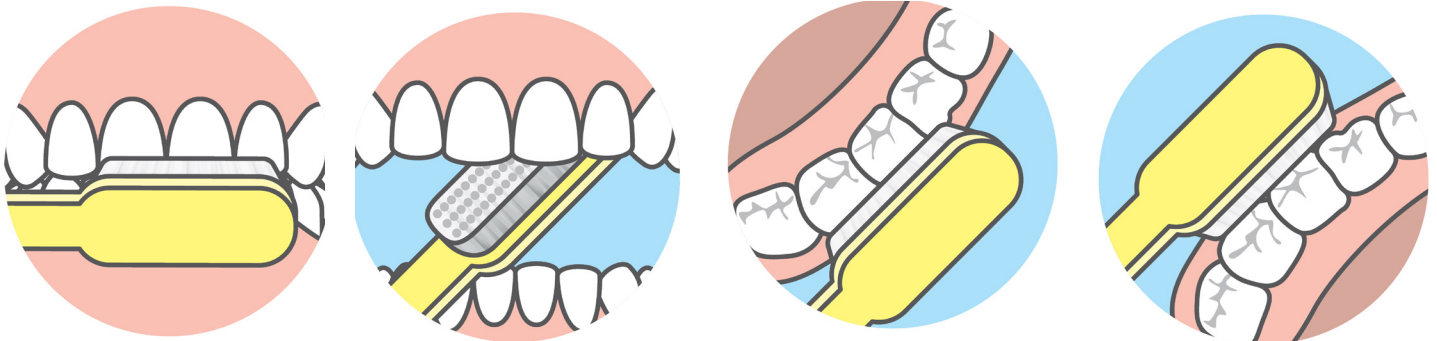
- **Toothpaste:** Make sure to use an ADA-accepted fluoride toothpaste.
- **Water flossers** that clean between teeth can be a good option if you have trouble flossing by hand or if you have dental work that makes flossing difficult, like braces or permanent or fixed bridges.

HOW TO BRUSH

It is important that you brush your teeth, for 2 minutes, at least 2 times per day and always before going to bed. Hold your toothbrush at a 45-degree angle to the gums, gently move the brush back and forth in short strokes and brush the outside, inside and chewing surfaces of the teeth. Brushing removes plaque, a film of bacteria that clings to teeth. When bacteria in plaque come into contact with food, they produce acids, which can cause cavities, irritate the gums, and lead to gum disease.

HOW TO FLOSS

About half of pregnant women have swollen, red tender gums that bleed when flossed or brushed. This gum inflammation is pregnancy gingivitis, a mild form of gum disease. Pregnancy gingivitis is partly caused by hormonal changes that make your gums more sensitive to the bacteria in plaque. Flossing does about half of the work required to remove sticky bacteria, or plaque, from your teeth.



Oral Health Begins at Home

During pregnancy, your oral health habits affect your baby teeth. The baby's teeth start developing during the 3rd to 6th month of pregnancy. In addition, poor oral health during pregnancy, has been associated with premature delivery, intrauterine growth restriction, gestational diabetes and preeclampsia.

Drinking water: Drink water throughout the day, especially between meals and after snacks. Drink fluoridated water (via a community fluoridated water source) or, if you prefer, bottled water that contains fluoride.

Going to the Dentist

It is more important than ever to visit your dentist regularly. Pregnant women may develop gum inflammation, bleeding and/or loss of calcium which can affect the health of your teeth.

BEFORE THE VISIT

Let your dental office know how far along you are in your pregnancy when you make your appointment, even if you only think that you might be pregnant.

Bring your OB/GYN authorization form to your first dental appointment. Some dentists may refuse to provide services if you do not have this authorization.

Let your dentist know about the medications you are taking or if you have received any special advice from your physician. If your pregnancy is high-risk or if you have certain medical conditions, your dentist or your physician may recommend that certain treatments be postponed.

DURING THE VISIT

Your dentist or hygienist will ask about your recent medical history and will examine your mouth to decide if you need X-rays or not. This will help detect any changes in your teeth or jaw.

Your dentist will examine your teeth with a gentle

instrument to find out if you have any gum disease and will conduct an oral health cancer screening. This exam can spot oral health problems at an early stage, before they develop and while they are still easy to address.

Your hygienist will perform a basic cleaning and will polish your teeth with a flavored paste. S/he will also review how to brush and floss your teeth properly.

Once your dentist finishes the exam, s/he will discuss your oral health with you, the condition of your teeth and whether there are any treatment needs.

Local anesthetics: If you are pregnant and need a filling, root canal or tooth extraction, one thing you don't have to worry about is the safety of the numbing medications your dentist may use during the procedure. Local anesthesia is, in fact, safe for both you and your baby.

It is important that you build a relationship with your dentist and keep her/him informed of any changes in your oral health. Only your dentist can determine what the best treatment plan is for you. Do not hesitate to ask any questions that you have about the recommended treatment or procedure and feel free to ask your dentist to explain it to you step by step.

Medications: Be sure your dentist knows if you are taking any prescription medications or over-the-counter drugs. This information will help your dentist determine what type of prescription, if any, to write for you. Your dentist can consult with your physician to choose medications—such as pain relievers or antibiotics—that are safe to take during pregnancy.

Both your dentist and physician are concerned about you and your baby, so ask them about any medications they might recommend.

After you give birth, it is important that you keep regular visits to the dentist. Hormonal changes during menstruation or some birth control methods can cause inflamed gum tissues due to an exaggerated reaction to toxins produced by plaque. Tell your dentist if you take birth control pills.



Paying for Your Oral Health Care

In California, pregnant women have more choices for dental coverage than ever before. But it varies depending on your family's income and the county where you live. These are some of the options available to you in California:

Insurance by employers: Your employer may provide you with health coverage, however, not all employers offer dental benefits. If you need to purchase additional coverage for dental services, read the policies carefully. Benefits can vary considerably depending on the dental plan you purchase.

Covered California: Covered California is available for purchase by middle to higher income citizens and residents with legal status in the United States. Participants will also need to buy additional coverage for dental services.

Medi-Cal is available for low income adult citizens, legal residents and PRUCOL participants. Effective January 2018, the Department of Health Care Services restored full-scope dental coverage for adult Medi-Cal beneficiaries.

MEDI-CAL FOR PREGNANT WOMEN

Regardless of their immigration status, all adult pregnant women qualify for Medi-Cal if they are low income. They can also receive full-scope dental care through Denti-Cal.

MCAP: This program is for pregnant women with incomes 213% to 322% of the Federal Poverty Level. Pregnant women who qualify for MCAP also receive dental coverage from Denti-Cal.

My Health LA: Regardless of their immigration status, low income adults in Los Angeles County, including pregnant women, receive health coverage including basic dental services delivered at a qualified community clinic that accepts Denti-Cal.

What Does Your Dental Plan Cover?

Dental coverage depends on the type of plan you have. For example, dental benefits vary between public programs, such as Denti-Cal, and a private health plan. Most plans pay all (or most) costs for preventive care such as cleanings and fluoride treatments.

It is important to know that many dental plans have an annual benefit limit and a deadline of December 31. This means that any unused benefits do not roll over into the New Year. However, because some plans may terminate at different times of the year, check your dental plan documents to be sure. And take advantage of your dental benefits before they expire!

Once you determine what your dental needs are, work with your dentist and benefits provider so that you understand what services are covered. Often, your dentist's office will look into this for you. You can also call your plan using the customer service 800 number on your identification card, or go to their website for more information.

THE SYSTEM

It can be tempting to base your dental care decisions on what your plan will pay for. However, the least expensive option is not always the healthiest option. Before you commit to a dental plan, make sure you understand how you and your plan will share costs. This can be done in several different ways:

Deductible: A deductible is applied to all services and the full deductible amount must first be paid by you before your plan kicks in and starts to pay for covered services. Most plans don't require a deductible for preventive and diagnostic services.

Co-payment: In most cases, you will be expected to pay a co-payment, a percentage of the dentist's charge or allowed benefit amount. This is called coinsurance. For example, if your plan pays 80% of the amount owed to your dentist, you will be required to pay the remaining 20%.

Annual Maximum: This is the maximum dollar amount a plan will pay during the course of the plan year. You will be required to pay anything over that dollar amount. For example, if your annual maximum is \$1,500 and your dental expenses are \$3,500, you will be responsible for the additional \$2,000. If the annual maximum of your plan is too low to meet your needs, you may want to ask the plan how to get a higher annual maximum. If your plan covers braces, there is usually a separate lifetime maximum limit.

Fixed Dollar Amount (Capitation) Programs: You pay a fixed dollar amount for each dental visit or specific treatment. The remainder of the treatment cost is covered by the program.

Choosing the Best Dental Home for Your Needs

If you are looking for a new dentist, search for someone who will do more than just clean your teeth. Dental health is a vital part of your overall health and it is important that everyone have a dental home where they feel comfortable.

A dental home gives you a safe and trusted place to turn to whether it is for a routine visit or a dental emergency. Here are some strategies to help you find the best dental fit for you and your family.

START WITH THE BASICS

Regular visits are key to good health and a beautiful smile, so start with the details that work best for you, your lifestyle and your family's dental care needs. Some things to consider:

- Is the office easy to get to from your home or job?
- Does the dentist have office hours that are convenient for you?
- If you have dental coverage, is the dentist in your dental plan's network?
- Do you feel comfortable there?
- Doctor-patient communication is very important. Will you need translation or interpreter services?
- Is the dentist a member of the American Dental Association (ADA)?

To find a dentist that is right for you, make a list of possible candidates. Don't be shy. Call or visit the dentists' offices before you make a decision. Some questions to ask:

- Will the dentist explain how you can prevent dental problems? Do they provide instruction about how to care for your teeth?
- How does the dentist and office staff handle emergencies that happen outside of office hours?
- Is the office staff familiar with your dental plan's benefits? Do they offer financial options for treatment costs?
- Will your medical and dental history be recorded? Is it secured in a safe and permanent file?



“Look for a dentist who can be a coach to motivate you, a trusted advisor to turn to when health issues arise and a partner to make dental care decisions with.”

—DR. TAYLOR-OSBORNE.

After Your Baby Is Born

It is important for you that you to keep brushing with a fluoride toothpaste and flossing at least twice per day. You also need to eat healthy and keep your dental regular dental visits. If your mouth is healthy, your baby is more likely to have a healthy mouth too.

CARING FOR YOUR BABY'S GUMS AND TEETH

- Breast milk is the best!
- Clean your baby's gums after every feeding, even before their first tooth starts coming out.
- Germs can pass from your mouth to your baby's mouth.
- Use a different spoon to taste your baby's foods.
- Clean your baby's pacifier with water. Do not use your mouth to clean it.

You can find more tips in how to take care of your baby's teeth in our 0–5 years old messages.