



AUSTRALIAN DENTAL  
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# DENTAL HEALTH AND PREGNANCY

Pregnancy is an exciting time for women (and their other half!). There are names to be chosen, cute clothes to be bought and the joy of bringing a new person into the world to be experienced.

However, it is also a challenging time in terms of health. Changes in hormones mean many women face various health issues including oral health issues.

Many have heard the saying "one tooth is lost with every pregnancy" but this is merely an urban myth. The truth is, the hormone changes brought about by pregnancy may cause some changes to oral health, but, as with other health issues, these can be managed effectively.

Here is some important information about pregnancy and oral health that will assist women in ensuring good oral health throughout pregnancy and beyond.

## Before pregnancy

Whether you are pregnant or not, everyone should maintain good oral hygiene. It is important to have a daily routine of care established so that you have a good foundation.

Brush twice a day with a soft toothbrush and fluoride toothpaste. Use dental floss and mouthwash to clean between teeth where the toothbrush cannot reach. Just these simple steps will ensure that plaque (bacteria, saliva and food remnants) does not build up.

Also, visit your dentist regularly - if you need any dental treatment, it may be more comfortable for you to have this done before pregnancy in case you experience nausea or tiredness as your pregnancy progresses.

If you are already pregnant or suspect you are, it is important to inform your dentist as it may affect the type of care necessary for you.

For example, your dentist may choose to postpone X-rays and elective procedures until after the birth. If there is a dental emergency that requires general anaesthesia or prescribed medication, your obstetrician should be consulted.

## DURING PREGNANCY

There are many common oral health issues that pregnant women may face. Again, simple steps can be taken to deal with each issue.

### 1. Plaque and gingivitis

When you are pregnant, hormonal changes may lead to an increase in the amount of plaque on your teeth. If plaque isn't removed, it can cause gingivitis or even gum disease. Symptoms include bleeding and swelling of the gums.

Some pregnant women suffer from 'pregnancy gingivitis', with the condition likely to appear in the second trimester. Here, hormonal changes induce bleeding in the gums despite the best possible hygiene measures. Your dentist can identify this. Gums usually revert to normal after baby is born.

If not treated, gingivitis can develop into more severe forms of gum disease such as periodontal disease. Periodontal disease is a chronic bacterial infection of the gum tissue that supports a person's teeth, where the bacteria start to move deeper and thrive in the gap between the gum and the tooth, causing the attachment of the tooth and its supporting tissues to break down. If identified, this must be treated as a matter of urgency as gum disease has been linked to premature birth and low birth-weight in babies.



## 2. Morning sickness

If you suffer from morning sickness and vomiting, the acid from your stomach contents has the potential to dissolve some of the tooth enamel. To avoid damage to your teeth, don't brush the 'softened' tooth enamel if you have just vomited.

Instead, smear some fluoride toothpaste on to your teeth and rinse with water or use a fluoride mouthrinse.

## 3. Gagging

This can sometimes occur when you are brushing your teeth. If you feel sick, try to concentrate on your breathing while cleaning your back teeth. Alternatively, you may need to brush without toothpaste. A fluoride mouthrinse can be used after brushing.

## 4. Cravings

Cravings in themselves are not a health issue but if you are frequently snacking on high carbohydrate foods, you may risk getting dental caries (decay). Try to vary the snacks you are eating and choose foods low in sugar, fat and salt but high in fibre. In addition, drink lots of water and milk.

Keys to maintaining good oral health

In addition to being aware of these specific issues, it is important to keep up with your oral hygiene routine of brushing twice daily, mouthrinsing and flossing.

Again, it is important to keep visiting your dentist regularly to monitor your oral health. Your dentist will also be able to clean your teeth thoroughly of any plaque build up.

## YOUR BABY'S ORAL HEALTH

Mothers-to-be can also directly affect the oral health of their babies.

For example, babies begin to develop their teeth and bones in the fourth month of pregnancy. The calcium and phosphorous they need to do this comes from what you eat and, if necessary, from your bones. Your baby will need even more of these minerals when you are seven-nine months pregnant.

The best way to obtain these minerals is through the intake of dairy products or, if you are having difficulty consuming the recommended amount, your doctor may recommend calcium supplements. The recommended daily intake for pregnant women is 1,100 mg during pregnancy and 1,200 mg while breastfeeding.

Also, speak to your dentist about dental care for your new baby.

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**For more information about ADA Dental Health Week, for interview and/or feature and pictorial opportunities with an ADA spokesperson, please contact Porter Novelli Melbourne:**

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