

Dental care in pregnancy



GERBER DENTAL GROUP
BURLEIGH HEADS

The old wives tale that suggests you lose a tooth for every baby, has been true for many women over the years, but with improved education and better access to dental care, there is no need for this to be the case now.

Pregnancy is characterised by hormonal changes, dietary changes, morning sickness and reflux. All these normal pregnancy changes can contribute to gum and dental problems if you don't take extra care during your pregnancy.

Before you become pregnant

Arrange a time to visit your dentist and have a thorough examination and scale and clean. It's important that you have set of x-rays taken so your dentist can see what is going on below the gum line and give you an indication of any areas of decay or infection that may exist. Pre-pregnancy a good time to have radiographs or x-rays done and it is a good idea to consider having any small areas of decay or leaking fillings treated so they don't cause a problem once you are pregnant. It's best to avoid x-rays while you are pregnant if possible, however if it is necessary, there are precautions you can take such as using a protective apron and having x-rays taken with digital imaging rather than traditional film x-ray. A scale and clean will remove any calculus from your teeth and ensure that you gums are healthy before the pregnancy hormones kick in.

Common dental problems in pregnancy

Decay and tooth erosion

Pregnancy itself doesn't cause dental decay, however the increased acid levels from nausea and reflux can contribute to acid wear and enamel weakening in your teeth. If you suffer from reflux or severe morning sickness, you might wish to consider using a protective product such as tooth mousse. This can be used with a tooth brush or medication trays but it is only available from your dentist. It is also a good idea to rinse with water after you vomit rather than brushing your teeth. The gastric acid softens the tooth enamel so it is a good idea to wait about 30 minutes until the tooth surface recovers.

Changes in the food you eat or the frequency of snacks can also contribute to dental decay. Be careful about the sugar or acid content of snacks (remember even fruit has sugar) and make sure you clean your teeth after each meal. Snacking between meals means that food and bacteria are sitting around your teeth and gums for extended periods of time and this is ultimately what leads to areas of decay developing.

Gingivitis

Many pregnant women will experience bleeding gums at some stage during their pregnancy. The hormones involved with pregnancy cause changes to the gum tissue and the local immune system which means bleeding is more common and the bodies' ability to fight bacteria and plaque is reduced. It is important that you continue to clean your teeth and gums even if some bleeding occurs, however you may wish to change to a softer toothbrush and even use mouth rinses such as Clossys II to help reduce the bacteria levels. Remember to talk to your dentist or hygienist if you are concerned.

Periodontitis

Periodontal disease is responsible for bone loss and eventual tooth loss if it is not managed properly. It is a multifactorial disease which generally begins with bacteria and dental plaque causing gum infection. The infection enters the blood stream and research indicates that it triggers an inflammatory response which is also linked to the onset of labour. This is of particular concern for pregnant women and periodontal disease has been linked to pre-term birth and low birth-weight babies. The most important risk factors for developing periodontal disease include cigarette smoking, cannabis smoking, age, stress, diabetes mellitus and high plaque levels. Regular dental visits are the best way of preventing periodontal disease and early detection any problems.

Pyogenic granuloma

This is also called pregnancy tumour and it can be found in up to 5% of pregnant women. It is a localised inflammation of the gum tissue and these lesions are very vascular, bleed easily and can be quite painful. In some cases, the granuloma can be excised or removed, however often good oral hygiene is enough to manage it. Even if it is not causing any problems, it is a good idea to get any strange lumps or lesions checked out by your dentist.

Dental treatment during pregnancy

Current research does not suggest that dental treatment during pregnancy causes any adverse effects to mother or baby. However, it is best to avoid unnecessary treatment if possible because there are potential associated issues such as the use of local anaesthetic, antibiotics and pain relief medications. Emergency treatment should be carried out if necessary and not delayed where possible as this can lead to long term problems such as spread of infection, bone loss and eventual tooth loss. Again, prevention is better than cure, so make sure you address any areas of concern before you become pregnant.

Prevention in pregnancy

- Have your pre-pregnancy dental check and clean. If it is too late and you are already pregnant, make an appointment anyway. Your dentist can still assess your teeth and gums and let you know if there is anything urgent that needs attention.
- Complete any dental treatment before you get pregnant so there is less risk of needing emergency treatment during your pregnancy.
- Drink plenty of water – avoid high sugar soft drinks and juices.
- Use a fluoride based tooth paste after each meal.
- Avoid snacking between meals where possible.
- Ask your dentist about protective products such as tooth mousse and Clossys II rinse.
- Stop smoking.

Choosing your dentist

At Gerber Dental Group we offer a full range of dental care treatment options using state of the art equipment in a modern and comfortable environment. We have three highly skilled and experienced dentists and a dedicated hygiene team to manage your ongoing dental care. If you are planning a pregnancy or if you have a little bundle of joy on the way, we are here to provide you with all the information and care that you will require. Further information about Gerber Dental Group can be found at www.gerberdentalgroup.com.au