



Pregnancy and Dentistry

There are a lot of myths regarding pregnancy and dentistry. “I can’t go to the dentist right now because I’m pregnant” and “You lose a tooth for every baby” are just a couple of examples. So what is the real truth about teeth and pregnancy?

Pregnancy is a very important time to see the dentist! The hormones involved in pregnancy can really cause trouble for the gums if a person doesn’t have immaculate home care. For some reason women think they cannot be dental patients while pregnant. Always tell your dental provider that you are pregnant. Regular cleanings are necessary to ward off *pregnancy gingivitis*, which is a hormonal cause for bleeding of the gums. And with regular dental care, one should *never* lose a tooth simply because she has a baby (while writing this I am pregnant with my third child and have never had decay or gum disease due to being pregnant)! So don’t put off seeing your dentist simply because you are pregnant.

What about safety? First, always tell your dental provider that you are pregnant. We may not take x-rays on a routine care basis just to be safe, but in an emergency situation (broken tooth, pain, abscess) x-rays may be utilized with a lead apron to protect the growing baby. If you already had x-rays and then found out you are pregnant, not to worry. The radiation from dental x-rays is minimal and the lead apron, which we routinely use, allows *no* radiation to get to the abdomen. Everything else used in regular dental checkups is safe. Elective care is best done after the baby is born, but can be performed safely in the second and third trimesters if necessary.

One recent health issue about dentistry and pregnancy is pre-term delivery in women with periodontal disease. Studies have shown that those women who have gum disease of any stage may be at risk for pre-term delivery and lower birth weight babies. If you have gum disease and want to become pregnant, treating the gum disease first is advisable. However, treating it after pregnancy is better than not at all. Again, it is wise to keep your regular 6-month schedule especially while pregnant.

Another reason we like to see pregnant patients is to try and convince them to stop smoking. Smoking is not only linked to low birth weight, but is also linked to birth defects of the mouth and throat. The September issue of the Journal of American Dental Association showed a study that suggested smoking during the first trimester increased the incidence of cleft lip and cleft palate by 2-3 times the norm. This is a defect requiring surgery in newborns, and cleft lip is difficult to repair without lasting visual scars.

While it is good to have some fluoride during pregnancy to help the developing baby teeth in the fetus, fluoride supplements are no longer recommended. For several years, moms were getting too much fluoride with supplements and this causes baby teeth to be stained white or brown. It has been determined that most pregnant women get the fluoride they need from the water or prepared food and drink that they consume. If you have questions about your fluoride consumption, ask your dentist.

There is no good reason to put off seeing your dentist just because you are pregnant. As a matter of fact there are many reasons to visit your dentist *especially* when you are pregnant!

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