



## Dental care during pregnancy: What you need to know

Michelle Bruns Maffei

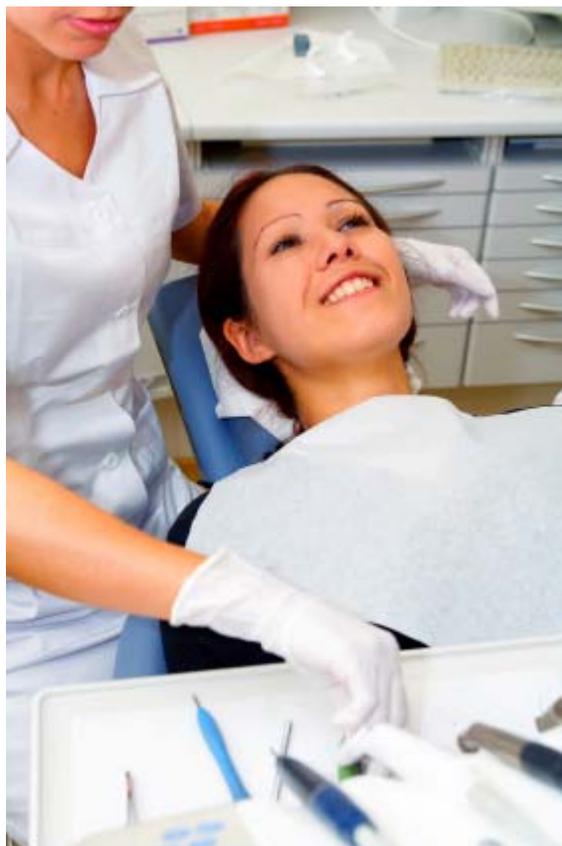
**Pregnancy-induced morning sickness may have you feeling like skipping the tooth brush and dental work, but it's more important than ever to take care of your teeth. Read on to find out how your oral health has a direct link to keeping your baby safe and healthy.**

Most pregnant moms-to-be know the importance of taking care of their health during pregnancy, but did you know that hormonal changes during pregnancy can result in increased risk of gum disease which may have an adverse affect on your unborn baby?

According to Dr. Bicky Tran of Simply Dentistry in Scottsdale, AZ, "Statistics have shown a 7 times likelihood for mothers [with periodontal disease] to deliver pre-term and low weight babies." Good news is that if taken care of, you can avoid having your chopper challenges affect your baby in utero. But first, it's important to understand why a healthy mouth can mean a healthy baby.

### The link between oral health and pre-term birth

As if the possibility of swelling of the ankles wasn't enough during pregnancy,



inflammation of the gums (better known as Pregnancy Gingivitis) can be added to the list of pregnancy symptoms as well.

Problem is, your smile isn't the only thing to suffer when you don't take care of your teeth and gums. "What we know is a bacterium known as fusobacterium nucleatum has been linked to premature births and stillborn infants," says Dr. Jodi Danna. So, where do you find this bad bacterium? "Fusobacterium nucleatum bacteria is associated with periodontal (gum) infections," which crosses the placenta and into your baby's system. To reduce the likelihood that you develop these ailments, the first step is to get on the same page with your dentist, even before you conceive.

Let your dentist in on your baby plans and/or pregnancy.

Whether you're still in the planning stages of conception, or you suspect you may have a baby on board, share your plans with your dentist. This allows them to plan your current treatments such as antibiotics and anesthetics, postpone x-rays, and set up a prenatal dental care plan with your pregnancy.

"Dental care for pregnant women should start before their pregnancy," advises Dr. Gene Sherman. "Pregnancy gingivitis commonly starts to occur in the second trimester, so prenatal dental care should really start with a visit to the dentist to prevent the likelihood of dental emergencies during the pregnancy that are difficult to treat."

Find out here what dental procedures are safe -- and which should be avoided -- during pregnancy.

## Know your dental insurance options

Now that you understand the importance of taking care of your teeth during this delicate time, the last thing you want to do is skip your dental care simply because of costs; it could end up costing you your baby's health. From state-funded programs to local community health programs where dental care fees are based on income, there are programs designed to encourage expectant mothers to continue prenatal dental care.

In addition, options for financing your dental care are available as well, such as CareCredit, which even offers deferred interest programs for dental health expenditures. With a little research, you can find the options that work best for your finances.

## Dental work safety during pregnancy

Dr Colleen Olitsky offers the following tips to her pregnant patients:

- Don't skip your dental checkup appointment simply because you are pregnant.
- The safest course of action is to postpone all unnecessary dental work until after the birth. However, sometimes emergency dental work such as a root canal or tooth extraction is necessary; the benefits outweigh the risks.
- Routine x-rays, usually taken during annual exams, can usually be postponed until after the birth.

- Elective treatments, such as teeth whitening and other cosmetic procedures, should be postponed until after the birth.

Armed with your tooth brush, floss, and the knowledge of keeping your teeth and gums healthy during pregnancy, you can help give your baby-to-be the best health possible before she's even had a chance to flash you her first dazzling smile!