

# Oral Health and Pregnancy

Maintaining good oral health during pregnancy might be the last thing on your mind as you deal with food cravings and morning sickness. However, it's important to look after your teeth and the ADA has developed a fact sheet with tips and advice to help you maintain good oral health during your pregnancy.

## Visiting the dentist

If you're planning on becoming pregnant it's important to visit your dentist and have a check-up. Routine dental treatment is safe during pregnancy.

If you are already pregnant, don't avoid visiting the dentist. It's important to check that your teeth and gums are healthy. Ensure you advise your dentist that you are pregnant when scheduling your appointment. Your dentist may recommend a dental check-up during your second trimester. That's because morning sickness has usually subsided in most women.

## Food cravings

It's not unusual to experience food cravings and even food aversions when you're pregnant. If your craving is for sugary snacks, you may increase your risk of tooth decay. As much as possible, try to snack on low sugar foods. If only sweet snacks will satisfy your craving, try to choose some healthier options such as fresh fruits and yoghurts. Ideally, consume your snacks as close as possible to meal times and brush your teeth after each meal if your sugar intake has been high. If you consume sweet snacks outside of meal times, try to rinse your mouth by drinking water or milk, which can help wash away decay causing sugars from your teeth.

## Morning sickness and reflux

It is estimated that 80 percent of pregnant women will experience some form of morning sickness during their pregnancy. Looking after your teeth might be the last thing on your mind while in the throes of morning sickness. However, doing so can help prevent longer term problems with your teeth.

If you are vomiting or experiencing reflux on a regular basis, your teeth will be exposed to strong stomach acids, which can cause dental erosion.

To help minimise the risk of erosion and decay try the following:

- Don't brush your teeth immediately after vomiting. Strong stomach acids can soften your tooth enamel and the vigorous action of the toothbrush may scratch the tooth enamel, leading to further damage. Wait at least an hour after vomiting before brushing your teeth
- Rinse your mouth with water (preferably fluoridated tap water) after vomiting, which will assist in removing acids
- You can lightly smear fluoride toothpaste on your teeth. Alternatively, rinse with an alcohol-free fluoride mouthwash, which will help to provide additional protection against stomach acids
- Your dentist can provide further information and individualised advice

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For more information on caring for your teeth visit the ADA's website:  
[www.ada.org.au](http://www.ada.org.au)

## Oral Health and Pregnancy *con't*

### Gagging while brushing teeth

If you find that brushing your teeth, particularly your molars, causes you to gag, try the following:

- Try a different flavour of fluoridated toothpaste
- Use a toothbrush with a small head, such as a one for toddlers
- Take your time. Slow down your brushing action
- Try closing your eyes and concentrate on your breathing

### You influence your baby's chances of dental decay

Research has found that the state of a mother's oral health can have an influence on the future oral health of her child.

You are the most influential role model in the development of your child's good oral health behaviours. Maintaining your own good oral health reduces the risk of tooth decay in your child.

### Gum disease (Gingivitis and Periodontitis)

During pregnancy your gums can become more sensitive to bacterial irritation and inflammation. This is because increased levels of hormones can exaggerate the manner in which your gums react to the bacterial irritants found in plaque.

Inflammation affecting your gums is called gingivitis. Gingivitis is more likely to occur during the second trimester. Signs include redness, bleeding and swelling of the gums particularly during brushing and flossing your teeth. Gingivitis can usually be treated with brushing and flossing.

Infection of the deeper gum tissue around the tooth is known as periodontitis. If periodontitis develops, your gums and teeth will be left with permanent damage and you may even suffer tooth loss.

Pregnancy may exacerbate periodontitis, and there is a link between periodontitis and premature birth and low birth weight babies.

It is therefore essential to practise good oral hygiene before, during and after pregnancy. It is important to see your dentist regularly for individualised advice.

### For healthy teeth you need to:

- Brush twice a day with a fluoridated toothpaste
- Floss daily
- Have regular dental check-ups especially when you are pregnant
- Follow a healthy diet
- Drink plenty of tap water
- Reduce your intake of sugary drinks and food
- Snack on healthy food

