

Oral Health and Pregnancy

Before you can welcome your bundle of joy into the world, you will likely experience many changes in your general health. Certain conditions are commonly experienced during pregnancy, including high blood pressure, iron deficiency and infections.

Did you know risks of oral diseases are also heightened while a bun is in the oven?

YOUR CHANGING BODY

The changes your body experiences take a toll on gums and teeth because of an increased blood flow, higher acid production and a rise in hormone levels. Due to these factors, it is likely you will experience at least some dental problems while preparing for your baby.

The March of Dimes is raising awareness to some of the common problems you could face:

Gingivitis: If you notice red, swollen or sore gums, there is a chance you are developing this gum disease. Without proper treatment, it can develop into a more serious disease called periodontitis.

Loose teeth: The heightened hormones and estrogen levels in your body during pregnancy can affect the tissues and bones that keep your teeth in place.

Pregnancy tumors: Lumps may form on swollen gums between your teeth and cause bleeding. They usually go away on their own, but serious tumors may require a removal surgery after pregnancy.

It is important to keep up with regular dental visits before, during and

after pregnancy.

RISKS FOR THE CHILD

The American Academy of Periodontology reports that studies suggest women with periodontal disease are more likely to deliver babies prematurely or with low birth weight. Mothers with healthy gums are much more apt to experience a full-term childbirth.

A premature or low-weight delivery puts infants at serious risk for long-term health effects. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, babies with a birth weight of less than 5.5 pounds are at risk for delayed motor skills, social growth and learning disabilities.

DENTIST VISITS WHILE PREGNANT

While pregnant, you might become overwhelmed with doctor's office visits, hospital tours and preparing your home for baby. Don't forget to find time to visit your dentist.

The ADA recommends telling your dentist even if you only suspect pregnancy. When scheduling your appointment, fill the office staff in on how far along you might be and any medication you take. They might need to change treatment methods.



Embracing Straight Smiles

Being confident in your smile is important for children and adults alike. If you are struggling with crooked teeth or an abnormal bite, meeting with a specialist might be the solution.

An orthodontist is a qualified dentist who continued his education to specialize in preventing, diagnosing and treating facial and dental irregularities. A common corrective measure is braces. Technology in tooth straightening has taken amazing strides. Some braces or aligners are nearly invisible.

TYPES OF TREATMENT

The days of wearing headgear for oral corrections are all but gone. Today, when it comes to choosing the corrective solution for you, there are many discreet options.

The American Dental Association has listed a few tools your orthodontist has to correct your smile:

Braces: For centuries, braces have been used to correct smiles. Today's options are more comfortable and non-intrusive than ever before. Braces work to shift teeth by applying pressure. Small brackets are cemented to the teeth and connected by wire or bands. A professional will gradually shift



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the teeth and jaw to the proper position.

Aligners: These clear plastic or acrylic materials are custom made to fit a patient's mouth. They work by gradually moving teeth into the position set by an orthodontist. Unlike braces, these are usually invisible and removable. They are a great option for correcting minor issues. Once you make an appointment, your orthodon-

tist will be able to strategize the best solution for your smile.

WHEN ARE BRACES NECESSARY?

Aside from correcting cosmetic issues with your smile, braces aid in solving problems with "bad bites." Your mouth is a complex system that relies on the correct position of your teeth, jaws, gums and muscles to work efficiently. Braces are

the most effective way to correct overbites and underbites.

Crooked or crowded teeth also make it harder to properly clean your teeth. Improper brushing and flossing encourages tooth decay and gum disease. Orthodontia will make it easier to maintain proper oral care.

ADULT BRACES

According to the ADA,

abnormal bites are usually noticeable in children between the ages of six and 12, meaning treatment is most effective as soon as these problems are noticed.

However, even if you're an adult with concerns about your smile, it's not too late to correct it. A specialist will analyze your situation and develop a strategy to achieve optimal results.

Teeth Whitening Options

Have you ever tried over-the-counter teeth whitening products and been left disappointed?

Strips, tray systems and even chewing gum have become popular options for people looking to brighten up their smiles — but they can't compete with your local dentist's professional whitening service.

WHEN TO AVOID OVER-THE-COUNTER WHITENERS

There is no comparison between the performance of these products and the experience you gain by visiting a professional dentist. There are some situations, however, in which an over-the-counter product might be useful, usually as a supplement after a professional cleaning.

Before attempting an over-the-counter whitening method, it is important to talk to your dentist about the state of your oral health. Those with sensitive teeth and gums, untreated tooth decay or gum problems can suffer from severe discomfort and even have their symptoms further irritate.

The whitening benefits of these types of products are so gradual that people see quicker results from a professional whitening. Rinses and strips are most effective to prevent new stains from developing



after a treatment.

BENEFITS OF A DENTIST

When you seek a professional for your whitening needs, they will be able to give a quick examination to ensure your oral health is good. Your dentist will be able to tell you about problems you might not have realized were present and show you the best method of treatment.

In addition to having a professional's opinion of your

smile, dentists also have much more powerful bleaching agents than over-the-counter products. This means, results happen much faster and teeth are even brighter.

You also will get professional advice about what to do between treatments to maximize their effects and keep your smile perfect.

WHAT TO EXPECT

Before your dentist begins your whitening treatment, he

likely will recommend a prophylactic cleaning. This is used to clear plaque and debris, creating a clean surface for bleaching agents.

During or after the cleaning, there is usually a brief examination to look for tooth decay, gum disease or cracking. Powerful bleaches can irritate certain conditions.

You will typically be fitted with a cheek retractor to expose your teeth, then a hardening resin will be painted on

gum tissue to protect them from irritation.

A bleaching gel will then be applied for about 15 to 30 minutes and sometimes for additional sessions. Once the gel has been removed, your dentist will determine the shade level difference.

It is an easy procedure if your oral health is good. Schedule an appointment with your dentist and soon you'll be showing off your beautiful smile.

Diet and Oral Health

The food you choose to fuel your body plays a significant role in your oral health. Avoiding foods and drinks with high amounts of sugar lowers the chances of tooth decay and potential gum diseases.

According to the American Dental Association, tooth decay is the single most common chronic childhood disease, but it's completely preventable. It's important to know different foods' effect on your family's pearly whites before you prepare the grocery list.

POOR NUTRITION AND PERIODONTAL DISEASE

Periodontal disease is an inflammatory bacterial disease caused by allowing other serious gum disease to go untreated. Gingivitis is formed when oral hygiene is neglected and hardened tartar causes inflammation. It is a precursor to periodontal disease.

Without seeking professional treatment, gingivitis infects pockets between gums and teeth, causing the two to separate and teeth to become loose. Once these pockets are infected, periodontitis has developed.

Eating a healthy diet can give you a great advantage in avoiding this disease.

According to a study by the National Center for Biotechnology Information, adding important vitamins regularly is crucial for avoiding periodontal disease.

• **Vitamin A:** Thanks to its powerful antioxidant potential, foods such as eggs, cod liver oil, broccoli and leafy vegetables can be used as a



supplement periodontal treatment.

• **Vitamin C:** Loading up on fruits and vegetables containing Vitamin C has positive effects on periodontal health.

• **Melatonin:** Studies show this antioxidant is beneficial for periodontal health. It is commonly found in cereals

and plants.

PLANNING A HEALTHY DIET

The American Dental Association deems saliva as your mouth's first line of defense against tooth decay. It is critical to limit the number of snacks you consume and try

to eat most of your calories in a well-balanced meal. Higher levels of saliva are released during a full meal than snacking. It helps wash foods from the mouth, lessening the effects of acids, which are dangerous to teeth.

Avoid eating foods high in sugars and carbohydrates, as

they can be targets to acid. Make sure to drink plenty of water throughout the day. This helps battle "dry mouth," when your saliva supply runs low.

A few delicious foods to consider for your daily meals should be whole grains, fruits, vegetables and lean protein, such as fish or chicken.