



# HAVING *a baby?*

Tips for a healthy pregnancy

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Taking care of  
yourself takes care  
of your baby.

Pregnancy is the most wonderful gift and a life-changing adventure! It comes with a mix of joy, new challenges, plenty of changes, a few sacrifices and a whole world of possibilities. The choices that you make while you are pregnant will have an impact in the development of your baby. This is particularly true when it comes to oral health. If you want to set your baby off to a healthy start, you will need to be mindful of how your nutrition and oral health can affect your baby even before birth.

Being pregnant can be exhausting! Daily oral care routine may be skipped or forgotten when you are feeling nauseous and tired. This can lead to plaque and bacteria build-up in your mouth. When plaque sits around for a while, your gums may bleed and get inflamed. The changing hormonal levels that occur with pregnancy can exaggerate some dental problems like gingivitis (inflammation of the gums) and periodontal disease (bone loss).

When you eat for two, you should brush for two. Pregnancy cravings and frequent snacking may increase the amount of food acids that come in contact with your teeth. Bacteria like Streptococci, already present in your mouth, will in turn produce more acids. This may weaken your enamel and make your teeth more prone to dental cavities.

An excess of bacteria in your mouth can travel from your gums into the bloodstream and eventually reach the fetus. Dental bacteria stimulate the production of prostaglandins – a chemical known to induce labor. Several studies have linked gingivitis and dental bacteria to pre-term delivery and low birthweight babies. To avoid gingivitis and dental decay, brush at least twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste and floss once a day. If you need dental treatment during pregnancy, it is best to get it during your second trimester. Your morning sickness may have subsided and it will still be easy for you to recline in the dental chair. Your dentist will try to avoid X-rays but, if necessary, they will be careful to protect you and your baby.

Morning sickness is real for a lot of pregnant women. Frequent reflux and vomiting can weaken tooth enamel as the stomach acids find their way into your mouth. Rinse with a teaspoon of baking soda mixed with water to neutralize these acids.

Baby teeth start developing six weeks after conception. Nutrients like calcium, phosphorus, vitamin D and proteins are essential for prenatal tooth development. If you don't receive these nutrients through your diet, your baby won't get them either. Having nutritional deficiencies during pregnancy may cause premature birth and low birth weight. Some enamel defects are common with low birthweight or illness in the newborn

infant. When you snack, choose foods that are low in sugar and full of nutrients like vegetables and fruits. If you feel like your diet is not adequate, seek professional advice on what supplements to take.

Continue the good habits once your baby is born. Parents can pass the cavity-producing bacteria to their babies once the first tooth comes in. Avoid sharing foods or kissing your baby on the lips. A baby that goes to bed with a bottle or is allowed to constantly suck on a sippy cup with juice or milk will be exposed to frequent acid attacks from bacteria in the plaque. It is not uncommon to see babies and toddlers with dental decay. Focus on preventive care. Wipe your baby's gums after each feeding and start brushing as soon as the first tooth appears. Start flossing when you see no space in-between your baby's teeth. Yes, you read this right; it is never too early to floss! Children should begin routine dental care with a pediatric dentist by age one so that problems can be detected or avoided completely.

Taking care of yourself takes care of your baby. By making the right choices, you will increase the chances of enjoying many years of healthy happy smiles. ✍️

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