



Women's Oral Health

Hormonal changes occur throughout a woman's life. During certain stages, she may have special oral health needs. Puberty, menstruation, pregnancy, menopause, and birth control pills affect a woman's mouth. But attention to good home care, regular dental visits, good eating habits, and limiting sugar-sweetened beverages will help to keep the mouth and teeth in the best condition for a lifetime.

Puberty

- During puberty, sex hormones (estrogen and progesterone) cause a female's body to mature. In addition to the visible body changes, these hormones can change the way the gums respond to germs in the mouth. Gums can become more prone to infection becoming red, swollen, and to bleed. Cleaning teeth and gums twice a day with brushing and flossing can limit this kind of infection.

Menstruation

- Mouth problems that can happen with the beginning of puberty are much the same during the menstrual cycle. Sometimes women prone to canker sores and cold sores may develop them each time they are on a menstrual cycle. If the sore does not heal in about two weeks, you should get it checked out by a dentist or physician.

Pregnancy

- Gum infection
 - ✓ The most common oral condition related to being pregnant. It occurs in 60% to 75% percent of pregnant women. Changes in hormones during pregnancy may make the gum tissue's response to any bacterial plaque worse and gums between teeth may swell and bleed easily. Often, women will avoid dental checkups for fear treatment might harm the baby, but research has shown getting dental care during pregnancy is safe and important. Untreated decayed teeth and gum infection put a mother and her baby at risk of being born too early or with low birth weight.
- Preterm and low birth rate deliveries
 - ✓ One recent study suggests women who have periodontal disease are at 7.5 times higher risk for having a preterm low birth weight baby than women who do not have periodontal disease. A woman considering pregnancy should try to have a healthy mouth before, during, and after her pregnancy.
- Dry mouth
 - ✓ Some women experience dry mouth while pregnant. Regular sips of water during the day and chewing sugarless gum can help. Diet is important to the mother as well as the health of the developing baby. It is important that a mother eat healthy foods while pregnant and avoid food or beverages containing high amounts of sugars.

After Delivery

- After your baby is born, continuing with good oral health behaviors will benefit you and your new baby.

Early Childhood Caries

- To avoid the risk of early childhood caries, never put your baby to bed with a bottle of milk, formula, juice, or any other sugary liquid. It is important to start cleaning your baby's mouth with a soft cloth, so he/she gets used to it. A baby's first tooth can be seen around 6 months and you can start to brush teeth with a smear of fluoridated toothpaste at that time. Make an appointment to have your baby's teeth and mouth checked by a dentist or dental hygienist.
- A parent or caregiver can pass on germs that cause tooth decay to the baby. These germs can get on the pacifier if you put it in your mouth to "clean it." These germs also pass on to the baby if you share a fork or spoon you have used to eat with.

Pregnancy Prevention

- Birth Control Pills or Oral Contraceptives
 - ✓ Because the birth control pill mimics the changes women may experience while pregnant, gum tissue changes occur. In addition to these changes, women on birth control pills may be more prone to healing problems after a tooth is removed. This can lead to what is known as a "dry socket," a painful condition that can increase the chance of bone infection during the healing process. To help avoid this condition, schedule the tooth removal appointment during the non-estrogen "sugar pill" days (days 23-28) of the pill cycle.

Menopause

- Menopause can also bring about certain changes in the mouth. The most common are pain, a burning sensation in the oral tissue, changes in taste, and dry mouth.

Post Menopause

- After menopause, there is an increased risk of developing osteoporosis (a condition of reduced bone mass and strength), which may increase the chance for tooth loss. Hormone replacement therapy may prevent this type of tooth loss. It is best to consult with your physician about the benefits and risks of hormone replacement.

What can women do to avoid mouth problems linked with hormone changes?

- Most important – practice good oral care by:
 - ✓ Brushing two times a day with a toothpaste containing fluoride
 - ✓ Floss once daily
- Have your teeth cleaned by your dentist or dental hygienist every six months or as directed by your dentist or dental hygienist.
- Talk to your dentist or dental hygienist if you have questions about your oral care.

Other Helpful Tips

- Always let your dentist or the dental staff know if you are pregnant.
- Always tell the dentist and the dental staff about any medications you are taking.
- Eat a well-balanced diet. Vitamins are important for your health and that of your baby.

NOTE: This fact sheet was derived from one previously published by the Arizona Department of Health Services.

Resources

National Maternal and Child Oral Health Resource Center (OHRC)

<https://www.mchoralhealth.org/highlights/dental-home.php>

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](https://www.cdc.gov/oralhealth/publications/features/pregnancy-and-oral-health.html)

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