



AUSTRALIAN DENTAL  
ASSOCIATION

# Oral Health & Pregnancy

## Knowing fact from fiction

During pregnancy we are bombarded with information and it's easy to get overloaded. Sometimes it can be hard to tell fact from fiction, and especially if this is your first child then you're probably being subjected to advice and helpful hints from everyone you know!

When choosing which advice to follow remember that your health and the health of your baby should be the most important factor. They are also intrinsically linked, which means if you ignore your oral health and how it changes during pregnancy it could be harmful to your baby.

Just like the rest of your body, your teeth, gums and mouth are affected by hormonal changes during pregnancy. It's important to not only maintain a good oral health routine, but make sure that you are aware of the changes that can cause irreversible damage to your teeth if not properly managed.

To help you avoid information overload, here are the key points:

### See Your Dentist

Just like you see your GP and your obstetrician, your dentist must be on your list of health professionals to consult during pregnancy. Hormonal changes can impact upon your oral health so regular check-ups and cleanings are not only a necessary part of pregnancy, but something you should do as a life-long commitment.

### Dealing with food cravings

Some women experience unusual food cravings during pregnancy. Succumbing to these cravings will happen now and then, so it is important to be mindful that a regular desire for sugary snacks may increase your risk of tooth decay. If nothing but sweetness will satisfy your craving, try to sometimes choose healthier options such as fresh fruits with natural or Greek yoghurt.

### Be careful of morning sickness

Morning sickness is beyond your control but it's important you know that vomit is extremely acidic and causes irreversible damage to your teeth, known as dental erosion. This makes your teeth more susceptible to sensitivity. No matter how much you might want to, don't brush your teeth for at least one hour after vomiting. If you do, you will be removing the softened protective coating (enamel) around your teeth leaving them even more exposed and vulnerable.

Instead, rinse your mouth with water to remove the acids, chew sugar-free gum or eat an acid-neutralising food such as milk, cheese or yoghurt. You can even smear a small amount of fluoridated toothpaste on your teeth for some additional protection and improve the taste of your mouth.

### Brush and Floss

This should be obvious, but brushing with a fluoridated toothpaste and flossing must still be a part of your daily routine, in fact changes in your hormones will mean your gums are more susceptible to inflammation and infections, so impeccable oral hygiene is a must!

You may find your gums are more swollen and sensitive during pregnancy; they might bleed and can be quite painful to brush and floss. This is known as 'pregnancy gingivitis' and is a result of changes in hormones that make gums more sensitive to the bacteria found in plaque. Bleeding while brushing and flossing due to increased sensitivity of the gums should not stop you from taking care of your oral health. If you're having difficulty, consult your dentist who can provide alternate preventive care.

### Don't delay treatment

It might seem like it's a good idea to delay dental treatment while you are pregnant to reduce risk for your baby, but the opposite can also be true. Instead of making these judgements for yourself see your dentist and follow their advice.

### Dental x-rays during pregnancy

There are many myths surrounding dental x-rays but the reality is, health professionals take every precaution to minimize radiation which has extremely low doses. In fact, you are exposed to far more radiation on a single domestic plane flight than you are getting from a dental x-ray. Of course if the x-ray is a part of your check-up, your dentist may recommend waiting until after the birth of your child, but if it is to assist diagnosing an issue you should always follow the advice of your dentist.

### TIPS AT A GLANCE

- Book an appointment with your dentist
- Be mindful of succumbing to sugary food cravings
- Beware of morning sickness & take appropriate measures to reduce erosion
- Have perfect oral hygiene habits
- Follow the advice of your dentist

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