

Taking Care of Your Teeth and Gums

Taking good care of your teeth and gums may help prevent preterm birth. Brush and floss every day and get regular dental checkups. Do not wait to see a dentist for dental problems you already have or for ones that develop during pregnancy.

Dental Checkups

Hormone changes during pregnancy can cause your gums to swell or bleed. This is called *pregnancy gingivitis*. It often starts in the 2nd or 3rd month of pregnancy and may become more severe through the 8th month.

Visit your dentist at least once during your pregnancy to check for pregnancy gingivitis and other dental problems.

- Ask your dentist if you need a referral to a *periodontist* (dentist with special training in treating gum diseases).
- Normal dental work like teeth cleaning should not affect your baby.
- If you think you have a dental problem, see your dentist right away. Fillings, root canals, gum care, and having teeth pulled are safe. They should be done if needed during pregnancy.
- Have dental X-rays only with safe and proper shielding.
- Any infection, including pregnancy gingivitis or *periodontitis*, is cause for concern during pregnancy. Periodontitis is gum disease that destroys the structures, including bone, that support the teeth.



Use a soft toothbrush and brush your teeth twice a day, after meals.

Medicines

- Some local numbing medicines, like lidocaine, are safe.
- *Systemic anesthesia* (pain medicine that enters your bloodstream) is safe **after** the 1st trimester.
- Most antibiotics are safe during pregnancy, but avoid doxycycline and fluoroquinolones.
- Pain medicines, including ones that contain *opioids*, are safe. Before using ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin, and others) during pregnancy, talk with your health care provider.



If flossing is a new habit, try putting a reminder note on your bathroom mirror.

Brushing and Flossing Tips

- Brush your teeth with a soft toothbrush twice a day, after meals.
- Be sure to clean all surfaces of your teeth, front and back.
- Hold your toothbrush at an angle where your teeth meet your gums. Make tiny circles with the brush to remove plaque and loosen any food that may be trapped.
- Back-and-forth brushing is for the tops of your molars, the teeth you chew food with.
- Also brush your tongue to help reduce the bacteria in your mouth.
- Take your time. Try using a timer to make sure you brush for at least 2 minutes.
- Floss once a day. Many people floss at bedtime so their teeth are clean while they sleep.
- If flossing is a new habit, try putting a reminder note on your bathroom mirror.

More Tips for Healthy Teeth and Gums

- Eat healthy foods and limit refined sugar. Sugar can lead to tooth decay and gum disease.
- Get plenty of calcium to keep your bones and teeth strong.
- Eat foods that are high in vitamin C to strengthen your gums.
- Check your teeth and gums every day. See your dentist if you have any of these symptoms:
 - Your gums are red, tender, or swollen.
 - Your gums bleed easily, or seem to pull away from your teeth.
 - You have bad breath that does not go away.

Resources for Dental Care

If you do not have dental insurance:

- Contact your county's public health department to learn about options for free or low-cost dental care in your area.
- The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) covers authorized dental care for pregnant women. You will need a letter from your pregnancy health care provider that says what your baby's due date is.
- If you are covered by DSHS/Medicaid, you may be eligible for University of Washington's School of Dentistry's Community Dental Care Plan. Call 206-616-6996 or visit www.huskydental.org.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your health care provider if you have question or concerns. UWMC clinic staff are also available to help.

Maternal and Infant Care
Clinic: 206-598-4070