

# The Dental Side of Pregnancy

Submitted by:

Brett Taylor, D.D.S.



**TAYLOR**  
... DENTISTRY ...  
Pediatric & General Dentistry

As an expecting mother, preparing for your new born becomes a daily responsibility. During this busy time, it is important not to overlook your oral health. Addressing oral health issues prior to delivery can minimize the risk of having to address larger problems after delivery when you'd prefer to care for your baby. Visiting your dentist, healthy eating, and great oral hygiene will help keep you and your baby healthy. Below are answers to common questions pregnant patients ask.

## Should I see the dentist during my pregnancy?

Yes! Most obstetricians recommend dental checkups and encourage patients to complete required dental work while pregnant. A recent study published in the August 2015 Journal of the American Dental Association concluded that there is "...no reason to prevent pregnant women from receiving dental treatment and local anesthetics during pregnancy". Cosmetic and other elective procedures should be delayed until after delivery. Most importantly, visiting the dentist can address issues before they become a problem.

## Are dental X-rays safe while pregnant?

When dental x-rays are used conservatively and with proper protection, they are safe and an important aspect of evaluating your oral health. Your dentist will evaluate your cavity risk to determine if x-rays are needed during pregnancy. Typically, x-rays are avoided in first trimester, unless in an emergency situation.

## Does morning sickness effect my teeth and what should I do after vomiting?

Increased nausea, usually associated with the first trimester as well as an increased gag reflex during pregnancy, can lead to more episodes of regurgitation and risk of enamel erosion from stomach acids being present in the mouth. Do not immediately brush teeth if vomiting has occurred. Rinse with 1 tsp baking soda in a cup of water to neutralize the acids. If no baking soda is used, rinse your mouth with water and allow 30-45 minutes to brush your teeth to minimize the effects of acid on the enamel.

## I notice my gums are bleeding more often. Is that common?

Changes in hormones during pregnancy can cause gums to become more irritated by the same amount of plaque. This is called pregnancy gingivitis and is a common oral complaint with pregnancy. Keeping your teeth as clean as possible can minimize this issue. Gums usually improve following delivery if good oral hygiene is maintained.

## Does pregnancy weaken my teeth and cause cavities?

Pregnancy does not directly weaken teeth. However, common changes to eating habits that occur during pregnancy can increase the risk of cavities. Frequent snacking on carbohydrate/sugar foods and drinks feed the bacteria that cause cavities. The longer and more often you snack, the greater the risk of cavities. Try to minimize the duration of eating, especially with refined carbohydrates, and drink water and/or chew xylitol or other sugar-free gum afterwards to minimize the effects.

## Can I transfer my cavities to my child?

Children are born without the bacteria in their mouths that cause cavities. They acquire that bacteria through saliva from others, most notably, their parents. Common ways this occurs are by licking pacifiers to 'clean' them and sharing utensils. Avoid transmitting your saliva and ask your dentist for specific tips on infant and toddler oral hygiene.

## When should my baby first visit the dentist?

The American Dental Association and the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry recommends a child's first dental visit to be near the child's first birthday.

*At your first prenatal appointment ask your obstetrician about their preference in regards to dental appointments and procedures.*

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