



Pregnancy is a time of great excitement and change. It is also a time to pay extra attention to your oral health.

You may have heard that you lose a tooth for every pregnancy, or that your developing baby will take the calcium he or she needs from your teeth. Both of these are myths; however, they point to the need for good dental care and good nutrition during pregnancy.

Tooth loss that sometimes occurs during pregnancy is most often the result of either tooth decay or gum disease. Women are more prone to both of these conditions during pregnancy for a variety of reasons.

Both gum disease and tooth decay are caused by plaque formation. Plaque is the sticky, colorless film that forms on our teeth every day. The acids and toxins produced by the bacteria in plaque are the cause of both tooth decay, and gum tissue inflammation and disease. Brushing and flossing daily are the most effective ways to remove plaque from teeth and keep tooth surfaces and gum tissues healthy.

Hormonal changes during pregnancy make the gum tissues more susceptible to inflammation and bleeding. This condition is called "pregnancy gingivitis." While the gum tenderness and easy bleeding associated with gingivitis happens more easily during pregnancy, it is still plaque accumulation on the teeth, not the hormone changes, that is the major cause of this condition.

More frequent eating patterns common among pregnant women, lack of thorough oral hygiene practices contribute to increased plaque formation, increased levels of gingivitis and tooth decay sometimes experienced during pregnancy.

There are other good reasons, beside your own dental health, to take extra care during your pregnancy. Some research suggests that serious gum disease (periodontal disease) is linked to premature birth and low birth weight.

Additionally, it is now recognized that mothers are the most common source of transmission of decay causing bacteria to their infants. Babies are not born with the bacteria that cause decay. Instead they are "infected" sometime in their early life. We now know that mothers that have healthy mouths, free of active dental decay, are much more likely to have babies that are healthy and free from early decay, and vice versa. A decision to keep your mouth healthy and treat decay that arises during your pregnancy is also a decision to help protect your baby's oral health.

Good nutrition is important too.

The foods you eat during your pregnancy affect every aspect of the health of your baby-to-be, including his or her teeth, not to mention your own health.

Your baby's teeth begin to develop below their gums between the third and sixth months of pregnancy, so getting the right nutrients is especially important then. A sufficient amount of protein, calcium, phosphorus and vitamins A, C and D will all help ensure healthy teeth for your baby. Fluoride is also an important mineral for healthy tooth development. Once your baby is born, your CDA member dentist and pediatrician will advise you on the optimal amount of fluoride supplementation to protect both you and your baby's teeth.

Visit your dentist early in your pregnancy and take your infant for a first visit when his or her very first tooth erupts. A healthy beginning can provide the foundation for a lifetime of good health – and there is no better time to begin than at birth!