

Ten Tips for a Healthy Pregnancy

1. Make a preconception visit with your health care provider and seek out health care as soon as you find out you're pregnant. Be sure to keep all of your health care providers well informed of pregnancy-related issues.
2. To improve your overall health, improve your oral health. Brush often, floss regularly, and visit your dentist, dental hygienist, or periodontist. Remember—you're brushing for two!
3. Take a multivitamin every day. It's the best way to make sure you're getting 400 micrograms of folic acid daily for the prevention of neural tube defects like spina bifida and anencephaly.
4. Eat a balanced diet with a variety of healthy foods. Check out organic options that eliminate exposure to unnecessary chemicals.
5. Get up-to-date and vaccinate! When you do, be sure to relay your plans for a pregnancy or whether you are in the first, second, or third trimester.
6. Don't smoke! Also, make a pledge to educate friends and family about the harmful effects of secondhand smoke on a new baby.
7. Avoid alcohol and illicit drugs in any amount. They can harm your baby and are *never* safe.
8. Participate in a monitored exercise plan. The right amount of physical activity enhances the function of the placenta by increasing blood flow and ensuring a sufficient supply of oxygen to help protect the fetus.
9. Always wear your seat belt and be safe on the road.
10. Visit www.hmhb.org for more information about healthy mothers, healthy babies, and healthy families.



I'm pregnant. How do I take special care of my teeth and gums?

Now is the time to baby your oral health. Just as you are doing all you can to eat well and get the right amount of exercise, you need to put proper oral hygiene right up there with other essential elements of prenatal care. Continue regular visits to the dentist, dental hygienist, or periodontist and be sure to let them know you are pregnant and if your pregnancy is considered high risk. It is very important to brush at least twice a day for two minutes each time, using a pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste. Always floss your teeth to remove any bacteria and food particles that your toothbrush cannot reach. Your teeth and gums may feel sensitive during pregnancy, but continue to

brush and floss, as it is essential to ensure that you are removing infection-causing plaque.

What are the health risks for a baby born too early and too small?

The earlier a baby is born, the less it will weigh, the less developed its organs will be, and the more complications it is likely to face. All babies born prematurely are at risk for serious health problems and lifelong challenges such as chronic lung disease, mental retardation, blindness, and cerebral palsy. Prematurity is the leading cause of neonatal death within the first month of life.

Is there anything else I should know about oral health and pregnancy?

Some pregnant women develop what is referred to as a "pregnancy tumor" in their mouths. Although

this condition is relatively rare, the tumor can grow up to three-quarters of an inch in size. Pregnancy tumors are harmless, usually painless, and disappear after pregnancy. However, if you have discomfort, or if it interferes with chewing or brushing, contact your dentist. After the birth, your gums should return to normal, with decreased bleeding and sensitivity. If these symptoms continue after delivery, contact your dentist.

For more information, go to www.hmhb.org

This publication was generously supported by:



Brush for Two... for Baby and You.



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- Other Resources**
- www.babycenter.com • www.marchofdimes.com • www.mchoralhealth.org
 - www.nidcr.nih.gov • www.perio.org • www.pregnancy.org • www.hmhb.org



Promoting the best from the beginning



Planning a pregnancy or already pregnant? Congratulations! Now is the time to pay particular attention to your oral health. Why? Because your oral health can have an impact not only on *your* overall health, but also on the health of the baby you are waiting for. When oral disease is present, harmful bacteria can spread beyond the mouth to the entire body. That's why taking proper care of your teeth and gums is essential to maintaining the health of you and your developing baby.

Pregnancy and oral health.

How does my oral health affect the overall health of my baby and me?

Proper care of the teeth and gums keeps them healthy. This is critical for your body's ability to resist harmful bacteria and, when infection occurs, heal adequately. Poor oral health weakens the immune system and makes you susceptible to periodontal (gum) disease. Periodontal infection can trigger the release of a chemical called prostaglandin, which is believed to cause premature labor. Recent research suggests that pregnant women with severe periodontal disease may be as much as seven times more likely to have premature or low birthweight babies.

What causes periodontal (gum) disease?

When bacteria in the mouth are not removed through regular brushing and flossing, they mix with saliva and bits of food to form a sticky coating on the teeth called plaque. Gum disease is caused by the germs living in plaque on the teeth and along the gum

line. Although there are several types of gum disease, the most common is gingivitis. Classic signs of gingivitis include bad breath and gums that are sore, bleeding, and swollen. Gingivitis can be easily treated with a professional dental cleaning, along with proper brushing and flossing. Left untreated, gingivitis can advance to a more serious form of gum disease called periodontitis. Periodontitis is a severe oral bacterial infection that can lead to bad breath or eventual tooth loss. More importantly, it can have harmful effects on your developing baby.

Why should I see a dentist before I get pregnant?

Preparing your body for pregnancy means being as healthy as you can in every respect, and it's important that you include oral health as part of your planning. The goal of a pre-pregnancy dental examination is to determine the status of your oral health *before* conception. Your dentist and dental hygienist will advise you of any existing disease, recommend appropriate

treatment, and educate you on how to effectively care for your teeth and gums at home.

What can I expect from my teeth and gums during pregnancy?

Some women experience sore, swollen, bleeding gums during pregnancy. Approximately fifty to seventy-five percent of women develop a condition known as "pregnancy gingivitis" caused by plaque and increased levels of the hormone progesterone. Bacteria in the sticky plaque can trigger an "attack" response from your immune system, resulting in red, swollen, and bleeding gums. Extra progesterone during pregnancy can also cause the gum tissue to swell and become sore. Your dental professional may recommend more frequent cleanings to prevent pregnancy gingivitis from advancing to the more serious condition of periodontitis.

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As a mom-to-be, what types of things should I do to take care of my teeth and gums?



- **Brush your teeth at least twice a day to remove disease-causing plaque from every surface of every tooth.** Ask your dental professional about incorporating a power toothbrush into your daily oral hygiene regimen. Recent research suggests that power toothbrushes remove significantly more plaque than manual toothbrushes.
- **Make it a goal to brush for at least two minutes each time.** Use a pea-sized amount of fluoride toothpaste to strengthen teeth and help prevent tooth decay. Be sure to brush your tongue as well as along the gum line.
- **Floss daily.** Clean between the teeth with dental floss daily to remove bacteria and food particles your toothbrush can't reach.
- **Change your brush head or toothbrush regularly.** If you use a power toothbrush, make sure you replace your brush head every three to six months. If you use a manual toothbrush, replace it every three months or earlier if it appears worn. Remember: the older the brush head or toothbrush, the less effective it is in removing plaque.
- **Visit your dental professional regularly.** Receive dental checkups and professional cleanings at least every six months, and ask about a periodontal evaluation. Make an additional appointment if you experience any of the following:

- Gums that bleed
- Red or white patches on the gums or tongue
- Persistent pain in the mouth or jaw
- Sores that don't heal within two weeks
- Problems chewing or swallowing



- Approximately seventy-five percent of adults in the U.S. have some form of gum disease, but the majority do not realize that they have it.
- Thirteen babies die every day as a result of prematurity and low birthweight.

- Emerging science suggests that pregnant women with severe gum disease may be as much as seven times more likely to have premature or low birthweight babies.
- One in every eight babies in the U.S. is born prematurely.

- Various studies have shown that treatment of gum disease before the third trimester may significantly reduce the incidence of preterm, low birthweight babies.
- Prematurity is the leading cause of neonatal death within the first month of life.

