

OBs: Have You Asked About Dental Visits?

Pregnant women and mothers of babies and young children are focused on so many things that they may not consider the importance of oral health. When seeing these patients, OBs can open discussion by asking, “Have you seen your dentist this year?”

Remind your patients that cavities (known as tooth decay or dental caries) and gum disease are caused by bacteria in the mouth and are preventable with good hygiene, a reduced-sugar diet, and regular dental care. Preventing cavities and gum disease with regular and early visits saves money by eliminating the need for expensive dental treatments later on.

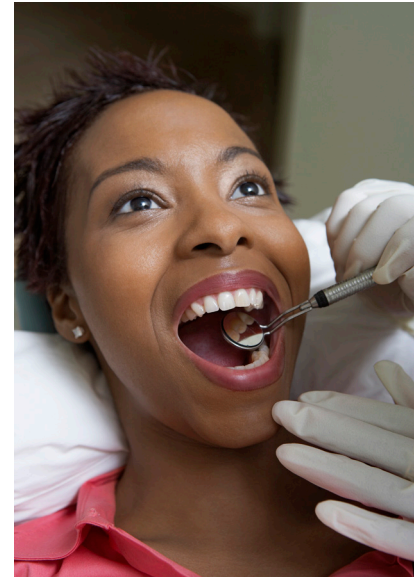
Educate patients on the following important steps to take:

- Brush and floss twice a day for two minutes (“2 x 2”) with fluoride toothpaste
- Limit sugary drinks (juice, soda, sports drinks) and sticky, sugary snacks
- Schedule dental checkups every six months (or more frequently if recommended by a dentist)

Let your patients know that dental care (including exams, cleanings, and X-rays with shielding) is safe during pregnancy — and recommended. Moreover, untreated problems can cause health issues for moms and their babies. For example, teeth may become weak from acid reflux or vomiting due to morning sickness.

Encourage your patients to combat this problem by:

- Rinsing with water, mouthwash, or fluoride rinse immediately after vomiting
- Waiting 10 – 15 minutes to brush after vomiting. Enamel is weaker during that time due to recent stomach acid exposure and can be worn away by brushing.



Let your patients know that dental care (including exams, cleanings, and X-rays with shielding) is safe during pregnancy

Share with your patients these common myths — and actual facts — about prenatal and infant oral health.

Myth: A pregnant woman should not see the dentist until after she has her baby.

Truth: It is important for you to see your dentist at least one time when you are pregnant. This is because pregnancy causes changes throughout your body, including your mouth. These changes can put you at a higher risk for health conditions like pregnancy gingivitis. This is when your gums swell and bleed. Be sure to ask your dentist how you can keep a healthy mouth during and after pregnancy.

Myth: A dentist doesn't need to know if a patient is pregnant.

Truth: It is important for your dentist to know if you are pregnant or trying to get pregnant. The changes in your body can affect the health of your mouth, and this may affect the health of your baby. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, gum disease has been linked to preterm birth. During your pregnancy, you will want to do everything you can to keep you and your baby healthy. Seeing a dentist can help.

Myth: Pregnant women should avoid dental work, like X-rays of the mouth.

Truth: Your dentist is a health professional. He or she will not perform any procedures that could harm you or your baby. If you are pregnant, your dentist may not want to do X-rays. But if the dentist thinks you need X-rays of your mouth, there is little risk to your baby. If you need X-rays, your dentist will ensure all precautions are taken for safety.

Myth: Women lose a tooth for each child they deliver.

Truth: This is just an old wives' tale. Childbirth has nothing to do with losing teeth, but an unhealthy mouth does. Keep a healthy mouth by brushing and flossing twice a day and seeing your dentist every six months.

Myth: Pregnancy takes calcium away from your teeth.

Truth: Your baby gets calcium from your diet, not your teeth. That's why it is important for you to eat healthy foods and take prenatal vitamins during pregnancy. This will help your baby get all the nutrients he or she needs to grow and develop.

Myth: Morning sickness is unpleasant but cannot harm me.

Truth: Morning sickness and vomit increases the amount of acid in your mouth. This acid can harm your teeth. After you get sick, the American Dental Association recommends rinsing your mouth thoroughly with water. After you rinse, wait 30 minutes and then brush your teeth.

Myth: Children do not need to see the dentist until age 3.

Truth: Your baby should have his or her first dental visit before his or her first birthday. The dentist will check for tooth decay and provide tips for keeping your baby's mouth healthy. After the first appointment, be sure to schedule follow-up visits every six months or as often as the dentist recommends.