

Dental care for Mother and Baby

Do I need to see my dentist during my pregnancy?

Yes. Due to hormone changes during pregnancy, some women's dental health needs closer attention during this time. For instance, you may notice that your gums appear to bleed more easily.

Why are my gums bleeding?

You may notice that your gums become inflamed during pregnancy, and they may bleed. This is due to hormone changes in your body. This means that you must keep a high standard of oral hygiene, visiting your dentist regularly. This may include appointments with the dental hygienist for thorough cleaning, and advice on caring for your teeth at home.

Is dental treatment safe during pregnancy?

Yes. There should be no problems with the routine treatment. The Department of Health advises leaving the replacement of amalgam fillings until after the baby is born.

What if I need dental x-rays?

As a general rule, dentists prefer to avoid dental x-rays during pregnancy if possible. However, if you need root canal treatment you may need to have an x-ray.

Does pregnancy cause damage to teeth?

There is no truth in the rumours about calcium deficiency due to pregnancy causing tooth problems or that you will lose one tooth for each child.

What if I am planning to breastfeed?

Some dentists think that you shouldn't have an amalgam filling while your breast-feeding. If you are unsure what your treatment would involve discuss all the options with your dentist.

What about smoking and alcohol during pregnancy?

Smoking and drinking in pregnancy can lead to an underweight baby and also affect your unborn baby's dental health. An underweight baby has a greater risk of poor teeth due to the enamel not being formed properly. It is worth remembering that the permanent teeth are developing in the jaws below the baby teeth at birth. So some babies whose mothers smoke and drink in pregnancy have badly formed adult teeth too.

What about diet during pregnancy?

When you are pregnant you must have a healthy balanced diet containing all the necessary vitamins and minerals.

Good nutrition from the mother during pregnancy is important for the baby's teeth to develop. Calcium in particular is important to produce strong bones and healthy teeth. This can be found in milk, cheese and other dairy products. Women who suffer from morning sickness may want to eat "little and often". If you are often sick, rinse your mouth afterwards with plain water to prevent the acid in your vomit attacking your teeth. Try to avoid sugary snacks and drinks between meals to protect your teeth against decay.

When will my baby's teeth appear?

Your baby should start teething at around 6 months old and will continue until all 20 "milk teeth" are in the mouth. At around 6 years old, the second teeth will begin to come through. This will continue until all the teeth, except the wisdom teeth, have come through at around 14 years old.

Is teething painful?

Most children do suffer some teething pains. Babies may suffer from a high temperature when they are teething and their cheeks may appear red and warm to the touch.

There are special teething gels that you can use to help reduce the pain. There are some that contain a mild analgesic (painkiller). You can apply the gel using your finger, and gently massage it onto your baby's gums.

Teething rings can also help soothe your baby. Certain teething rings can be cooled in the fridge, which may help. But, as teething pains can vary, it is best to check with your dentist or health visitor.

When should I take my baby to the dentist for the first time?

It is best to discuss this with your dentist first, but you could take your baby to your own routine check-up. This can help the baby to get used to the surroundings. Your dentist will be able to offer advice and prescribe medicines for teething pains, and will be happy to answer any questions you may have. The baby's own check-ups can start any time from about 6 months.

Does breast-feeding affect my baby's teeth?

The World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends that, where possible, babies should be fed only on breast milk until they are 6 months old.

There is research to suggest that breast-feeding for long periods can, in some cases, lead to tooth decay in your baby due to the natural sugars in breast milk. However, it is widely accepted that breast milk is the best food for your baby.

What about bottle-feeding?

Feeding with a bottle is fine. But you must sterilise the bottle properly. Never add sugar or put sugary drinks into the bottle. Milk and water are the best drinks for teeth. Bottle-feeding with drinks containing sugar can lead to “bottle caries” (tooth decay). A baby is not born with a sweet tooth and will only have a taste for sugar if it is given at an early age.

When should I stop bottle and breast-feeding?

Early weaning from the breast and bottle can help stop your baby from developing dental problems that can be caused by drinking from a bottle.

Try to get your baby to drink from a special cup by the time they are about six months old, or when they are able to sit up and can hold things on their own.

What solid foods are better for my baby?

Savoury foods such as cheese, pasta and vegetables are better than sweet foods. Food that doesn't contain sugar is better for your baby's teeth. Ask your health visitor for more advice about a balanced diet for your baby.

If your child has a drink in between meals it is important to have only water or milk instead of sugary drinks, which can cause decay.

Will my baby need fluoride supplements?

Fluoride does help to strengthen teeth. However, as fluoride is naturally found in some water supplies, it is important to ask your dentist whether your baby needs supplements. If so, supplements can start at about 6 months.

When should I start cleaning my baby's teeth?

Babies are obviously not able to clean their own teeth, and children will need to help ensure that they clean them properly until they are about 7 years old. As soon as teething has started you should start cleaning your child's teeth.

How should I clean my baby's teeth?

As soon as the first baby teeth begin to appear you should start to clean them. At first you may find it easier to use a piece of clean gauze or cloth wrapped around your forefinger. As more teeth appear, you will need to use a baby toothbrush.

Use a smear of non fluoride toothpaste or special baby toothpaste and massage it around the teeth and gums. It can be easier to clean their teeth if you cradle your baby's head in your arms in front of you.

As the child gets older it may be difficult to use this technique, but you can gradually give more responsibility for cleaning their teeth to the child. It is important to clean teeth twice a day with a toothpaste containing fluoride.

Check with your dentist or health visitor if you are unsure about how to look after your baby's teeth

What if my baby sucks their thumb or needs a dummy?

If you can avoid using a dummy and discourage thumb sucking. These can both eventually cause problems with how the teeth grow and develop. And this may need treatment with a brace when the child gets older.

Never dip your baby's dummy or teething ring into fruit syrups, honey, fruit juices or anything containing sugars, particularly at bedtime. These can expose your baby's teeth to harmful acids, which can attack the newly formed teeth and cause decay.

What if my baby damages a tooth?

If your child damages their teeth, contact your dentist immediately. It is not uncommon for the damaged tooth to discolour over time due to trauma.

