

## ***Oral Health During Pregnancy***

Getting your baby's oral health off to a great start doesn't begin with your child's first tooth. Good oral habits begin during pregnancy and can affect the health of both the mother and the child.

The first factor in developing strong teeth is good nutrition. A baby's teeth begin to develop during the 3<sup>rd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> month of pregnancy, and a diet with adequate calcium, protein, phosphorus, and vitamins A, C, and D are important for this tooth development. Adequate consumption of dairy products and prenatal vitamins will ensure that the baby's teeth have what they need to develop properly. Keep in mind that mom's diet will supply the baby what it needs, so it is a myth that any of the calcium a baby needs comes from the mother's teeth. Sorry, Mom, you can blame sleepless nights on your newborn, but not 'soft teeth'.

What can affect the mother's teeth, however, is a poor diet, rich in carbohydrates such as refined sugar. It is important to realize that the longer the teeth are exposed to carbohydrates, the greater the chance of tooth decay. Eat a well-balanced diet, and avoid constantly snacking, and your teeth will be much less likely to develop decay.

Achieving a well-balanced diet is often easier said than done, however, when it comes to the common problem of morning sickness. Care should be taken to protect the teeth from its effects. Do not brush your teeth for one hour after vomiting. Because the contents of the stomach are highly acidic, they can eat away at the enamel, and brushing will only make it worse. It is best to immediately rinse with something that can neutralize the acid. Mix a teaspoon of baking soda in a cup of water and rinse for 30 seconds. This will neutralize the acid and allow calcium to remineralize the tooth structure.

One thing that definitely changes during pregnancy are increases in the mother's hormone levels. These increased levels cause the gum tissue to be hypersensitive to plaque in the mouth. The result is that if plaque is not thoroughly removed with careful oral hygiene, the gums will become red, puffy, and tend to bleed easily. This 'pregnancy gingivitis' is treated by careful, daily, brushing and flossing and your dentist may recommend more frequent cleanings during the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> trimesters.

A more serious type of gum disease, called periodontitis, may even have health consequences for the child. Recent studies have shown a relationship between mother's with periodontal (gum) disease and low birth weight babies. For this reason, it is absolutely critical that mothers, and those women planning on becoming pregnant, have their gum disease treated. It is not only their health that could be at risk, but potentially that of their child.

For links to more information on dental care for mothers and children, please visit [www.MyLincolnDentist.com](http://www.MyLincolnDentist.com) and find out more.

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