



# ORAL HEALTH

## TALKING POINTS AND MYTHS

For WIC and Family Visiting Program Staff

### General Information

- Cavities (known as tooth decay or dental caries) and gum disease are caused by bacteria in the mouth and are preventable with good hygiene, diet, and regular dental care
- Preventing cavities and gum disease with regular and early visits saves money by eliminating need for expensive dental treatments in the future
  - Brush and floss twice a day with fluoride toothpaste
  - Limit sugary drinks (juice, soda, sports drinks) and sticky, sugary snacks
  - Schedule dental check-ups every 6 months (or more frequently if recommended by a dentist)

### Pregnancy

- Dental care (including exams, cleanings, and x-rays with shielding) is safe during pregnancy —and recommended!
- Untreated problems can cause health issues for Mom and baby
- Teeth may weaken from acid reflux or vomiting due to morning sickness
  - Rinse with water, mouthwash, or fluoride rinse immediately after vomiting
  - Wait 10-15 minutes to brush after vomiting because enamel is weaker during that time due to recent acid attack and can be worn away by brushing

### Infants/Toddlers

- Dental cleaning during pregnancy can reduce bacteria in Mom's mouth
- A healthy Mom's mouth will lead to a healthy baby's mouth
- Bacteria that cause cavities can be spread from Mom to baby
  - Avoid sharing utensils, cleaning pacifiers in your own mouth, and kissing your baby on the mouth
- Teeth should be brushed with fluoride toothpaste twice a day using a soft-bristled toothbrush as soon as the first tooth appears
  - Use toothpaste for an infant in the size of a grain of rice
  - Before teeth erupt, wipe the baby's mouth out with a soft cloth after feeding
  - Avoid bedtime or naptime bottles with sweet drinks or milk (give water only)
- A baby's first visit to the dentist is recommended by age one
- Dental exams are similar to a check-up with a pediatrician
- At the first visit, the dentist will talk about how to keep baby's teeth healthy (avoiding bad habits before they start) and look inside the baby's mouth for early signs of cavities
  - If you want, have your baby sit in your lap during the exam

### Children

- The health of baby teeth can affect the health of adult teeth
- Regular dental check-ups every 6 months are important to prevent and identify early signs of disease
- Children ages 2 to 6 years should have teeth brushed and flossed with fluoride toothpaste twice a day using a soft-bristled toothbrush
  - Use toothpaste for a child aged 2 to 6 in the size of a pea
  - Brush your child's teeth until the age of 7 or 8
  - Limit milk and juice to meal times, with water only in sippy cups and travel mugs
  - Brush teeth after sugary treats

## **COMMON MYTHS about Prenatal and Infant Oral Health**

**Myth:** It's none of the dentist's business whether I'm pregnant because being pregnant doesn't affect your mouth.

**Fact:** It's important for your dentist and hygienist to know that you are pregnant or trying to become pregnant. Pregnant women are at greater risk for certain oral health conditions. These conditions include gum disease, also known as "pregnancy gingivitis," and growths within the mouth, called "pregnancy tumors." Both conditions are treatable, so make sure to visit your dentist.

**Myth:** Pregnant women should avoid seeing the dentist until after they deliver.

**Fact:** The best time to visit the dentist for a cleaning and checkup is **before** you become pregnant to ensure a healthy mouth. An increase of hormones is common during pregnancy, and this increase causes an inflammation of blood vessels in the gum tissue. This leads to "pregnancy gingivitis," where gums are inflamed and bleed easily. This usually subsides after pregnancy.

**Myth:** Pregnant women should avoid dental work, especially x-rays.

**Fact:** If you're pregnant, you face a higher risk for gum disease, so make sure to visit your dentist for regular cleanings, exams, and any other treatment needed. Skimping on dental care could affect your pregnancy, as well as your dental health. Dental x-rays are also considered safe during pregnancy by the American Congress of Obstetrics and Gynecology (ACOG) and the American Dental Association (ADA). X-rays can be essential in detecting serious problems, such as hidden decay, bone loss, and inflamed tooth pulp.

**Myth:** Women lose a tooth for each child they have given birth to.

**Fact:** Although more of an 'old wives tale' than a myth, this is untrue. Hormonal changes while pregnant can cause gingivitis (inflamed or bleeding gums). Tooth loss is unlikely if you brush your teeth twice a day and see the dentist every 6 months.

**Myth:** Pregnancy leaches calcium from your teeth.

**Fact:** The fetus does not take calcium from its mother's teeth. This myth likely originated because pregnant women face a higher risk of tooth decay. Pregnancy is a critical time to consume calcium – this essential nutrient helps your growing fetus develop properly and lowers your own risk of osteoporosis (bone loss) later in life.

**Myth:** Morning sickness is unpleasant but harmless.

**Fact:** Repeated vomiting can cause serious damage to your teeth. Exposure to stomach acid dissolves tooth enamel, weakening your teeth's defense against decay.

**Myth:** Brush your teeth immediately after vomiting.

**Fact:** When vomiting occurs, gastric acids from the stomach enter the mouth. Teeth are not designed to withstand gastric acids, which can erode the enamel on your teeth. This can lead to sensitivity, cavities, and fractures. Brushing immediately after vomiting can further erode vulnerable enamel. Instead, try to rinse with plain water or fluoride mouthwash after vomiting. Then, after 15 minutes, brush with toothpaste containing fluoride.

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

**Fact:** Proper care for baby teeth is very important, as they help with chewing, aid in speech development, and lead to proper development of permanent teeth by saving space for them. The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD), American Dental Association (ADA) and the American Academy of Pediatrics all recommend a dental visit for children by age one. Baby teeth are vulnerable to tooth decay from their very first appearance, even as early as 6 months old.