



## WOMEN'S ORAL HEALTH

Hormonal changes occur throughout a woman's life. Puberty, pregnancy, menopause, and oral contraceptives (birth control pills) can affect a woman's mouth. With good oral care, regular dental visits, and good nutrition, a woman can keep her teeth for a lifetime.

### Puberty

During puberty, the sex hormones (estrogen and progesterone) can change the way the gums respond to germs (bacterial plaque) in the mouth. The gums can become more susceptible to infections such as gingivitis.

Women in puberty should brush their teeth and gums at least two times daily, for two minutes each time, and use dental floss. Dentists may recommend using mouthwash.

Adolescents with braces are at an increased risk for gingivitis, which if untreated, can lead to more serious gum problems later in life.<sup>1</sup> Women prone to canker sores and cold sores may have these reoccur during their monthly menstrual cycles.

### Pregnancy

Always tell your dentist and staff if you are pregnant, and the medications (including birth control pills) you are taking. It is important for your dentist to know this information, especially when prescribing antibiotics. (It is possible to have an interaction between birth control pills and antibiotics that causes the birth control pill to be less effective).

Continue to get preventive dental cleanings and annual exams during pregnancy. Untreated decayed teeth and gum infections such as gingivitis and periodontal disease put both a mother and her baby at risk. Gingivitis is the most common oral condition during pregnancy, occurring in 60-75 percent of all pregnant women. Hormones can cause gums to become very red, accompanied with swelling and bleeding.

Dental work such as fillings and crowns should occur in the second trimester if possible. In the event of a dental emergency during other trimesters, as well as antibiotics, x-rays, and anesthesia, consult with your dentist and obstetrician.

To prevent cavity formation, pregnant women should eat nutritious foods and avoid high sugar or empty calorie foods. Seek an obstetrician's nutritional guidance.

Once the baby is born, begin good oral health habits. Avoid the risk of baby bottle tooth decay by never putting your baby to bed with milk, formula, juice, or any other sugary liquid. Brush and floss your baby's gums and teeth. Take your baby to the dentist on or around his or her first birthday.

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## Oral Contraceptives

Women on birth control pills may experience gum changes and be prone to healing problems after a tooth is extracted. This can lead to what is known as a “dry socket,” a painful condition that can increase the likelihood of bone inflammation during the healing process. To help avoid this condition, schedule extraction appointments during the non-estrogen days (days 23-28) of the pill cycle.

## Menopause and Post Menopause

During menopause, certain oral changes can occur. The most common are pain, a burning sensation in the oral tissue, changes in taste, and dry mouth. To avoid dry mouth, frequently sip on water or chew on sugarless gum or candy.

After menopause, there is a higher risk of developing osteoporosis (a condition of reduced bone mass and strength), which may increase the chance for tooth loss. Hormone replacement therapy may prevent this type of tooth loss. Consult with your physician about the benefits and risks of hormone replacement therapy.

## How can women avoid oral conditions associated with hormone changes?

- Brush twice daily with toothpaste containing fluoride, and floss once daily.
- Have your teeth professionally cleaned by your dentist or dental hygienist every six months (or more frequently if recommended by your dentist).
- Eat a well-balanced diet. Vitamins and nutrients including Folate, B vitamins, protein, calcium, and vitamin C maintain the support system around the teeth.

For more information, contact the Division of Public Health, Bureau of Oral Health and Dental Services, at 302-744-4554 and [www.dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/hsm/ohphome.html](http://www.dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/hsm/ohphome.html).

## Resources

1. American Academy of Periodontology. 2014. *Gum Disease and Women*. In American Academy of Periodontology. Retrieved February 12, 2015 from: <http://www.perio.org/consumer/women.htm>
2. Why Proper Oral Care is So Important During Pregnancy. September 19, 2014. [Photograph of Woman with Toothbrush]. Retrieved February 16, 2015 from: <http://www.healthywomen.org/content/article/why-proper-oral-care-so-important-during-pregnancy>

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