Oral Health For The Expectant Mother

1. When is the appropriate time for dental check-up?

A. Prior to a planned pregnancy

An expectant mother can arrange a pre-pregnancy dental check-up before she is planning to get pregnant. This can prevent dental problems from worsening and avoid comprehensive dental treatment during pregnancy. The dentist can also provide her with oral health care advice during pregnancy.

B. 4th to 6th month of pregnancy

During pregnancy, the expectant mother still needs to have dental check-up. The best timing is the 4th to 6th month of pregnancy because the foetus is relatively stable at this stage. She should inform the dentist that she is pregnant before the dental check-up, so that the dentist can take the necessary precautions during dental treatment.

2. Will X-ray examination affect the foetus?

Dental clinics have adequate precautions for taking radiographs, such that the foetus can be safeguarded. Should the expectant mother have concerns, she can discuss with her dentist and see if the treatment can be postponed until she has given birth.

3. Can the expectant mother receive complicated dental treatment?

Unless absolutely necessary, complicated dental treatment like root canal treatment, extraction of impacted wisdom teeth, etc., should be avoided during pregnancy. These types of treatment should be carried out before pregnancy, or after she has given birth if possible.

4. What are the changes in the oral health condition of the expectant mother and how to take care of her oral health?

A. Hormonal changes

If pregnant women do not clean their oral cavity thoroughly, the hormonal changes during pregnancy may exaggerate the response of the gum tissues to the plaque bacterial toxins, resulting in red, swollen and bleeding gums. This is called "Pregnancy Gingivitis". Therefore, to prevent and control "Pregnancy Gingivitis", the expectant mother should pay attention to her oral hygiene. She should brush her teeth in the morning and at night before bed and use floss or interdental brushes to remove the plaque thoroughly.

B. Change in dietary habit

Pregnant women may often have a change in appetite. Food and drink intake may also become more frequent. Therefore, the chance of getting tooth decay may increase. During pregnancy, the expectant mother may crave sweet or sour food and vomit easily. These acidic substances can directly erode the outer layer of the teeth (enamel) and expose the inner layer (dentine), resulting in tooth sensitivity.

In order to protect her teeth, the expectant mother should use fluoride toothpaste for toothbrushing. It is because fluoride can:

1. help repair early tooth decay
2. strengthen the enamel, making it more resistant to acid attack
3. inhibit bacterial activity in dental plaque and reduce acid production.

If the expectant mother vomits or needs to eat more frequently, she may use fluoride mouthwash to get additional protection for her teeth. However, she should seek advice from her dentist before using it.

5. Will tetracycline affect the foetus's teeth?

From the 5th to 6th week of pregnancy, the foetus's tooth germs begin to develop. If the expectant mother takes tetracycline during pregnancy, the foetus's teeth may be affected during calcification due to the effect of tetracycline and become discoloured. Therefore, the expectant mother must tell the doctor that she is pregnant, so that the doctor can exercise caution when prescribing appropriate medication as the situation requires.