

Oral Health For The Expectant Mother

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

a. Prior to a planned pregnancy

Expectant mother can arrange a pre-pregnancy dental check-up and have all the dental problems treated before she is planning to be pregnant. This can avoid comprehensive dental treatment during pregnancy and dentist can provide her with oral health care message during pregnancy.

b. 4th to 6th month of pregnancy

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

2. Will X-ray examination affect the foetus?

Dental clinics have adequate precautions for taking radiographs like putting on lead apron for the patient and using fast speed film, etc., such that the foetus can be safeguarded. Should expectant mother feel worried, 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?

If the expectant mother has a tooth that really needs complicated dental treatment like root canal treatment, extraction of impacted wisdom tooth, etc., the treatment should be arranged to carry out after she has given birth. This could avoid discomfort during lengthy treatment procedures.

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 woman does not clean her oral cavity thoroughly, the hormonal change 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", expectant mother should pay attention to oral hygiene when brushing her teeth and using floss and interdental brush to remove the plaque thoroughly.

b. Craving for sweet and sour food

Pregnant woman may often crave for sweet and sour food due to dietary change. Food and drink intake may also become more frequent. Therefore, the chance of getting tooth decay may increase. During pregnancy, an expectant mother may crave for acidic food or vomit easily. These acidic food and vomit will erode the outer layer of the teeth (enamel) and expose the inner layer (dentine), resulting in tooth sensitivity.

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

1. help repair the early tooth decay

2. strengthen the enamel, making it more resistant to acid attack
3. inhibit the bacterial activities in dental plaque, reduce acid production.

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

5. Will tetracycline affect the foetus?

From the 5th to 6th week of pregnancy, teeth begin to develop in the foetus. If the expectant mother takes tetracycline during pregnancy, the teeth of the foetus may be affected and become discoloured. Hence she has to tell the doctor that she is pregnant, so that the doctor will take care in prescribing the appropriate medication if necessary.