

Oral Health for the Expectant Mother

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

a. Prior to a planned pregnancy

Once pregnancy is being planned, you should visit the dentist for dental check up. The dentist will treat all your dental problems and advise you the relevant oral health care for expectant mothers so that you will have a peace of mind during pregnancy.

b. 4-6 months pregnancy

Expectant mothers should keep the regular dental checkup during pregnancy, preferably at 4-6 months of pregnancy. During this period, the foetus is usually more stable and the size is still small. On the other hand, the mother's vomiting is less serious. However, it is necessary for the expectant mother to tell her dentist that she is pregnant so that he will make appropriate arrangement during dental treatment.



2. Will X-ray examination affect the foetus?

X-ray aids the diagnosis of oral diseases whenever necessary. The expectant mother could be rest assured with Xray examination because the dosage of dental X-ray is very low and the dentist will take all the necessary precautions to assure the safety of the foetus.



3. Can the expectant mother receive complicated dental treatment?

During pregnancy, the pregnant women should avoid the more complicated dental treatment, such as extraction of wisdom tooth, root canal treatment etc.



They should be arranged before or after the pregnancy.

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

The hormonal changes during pregnancy will cause an exaggerated reaction of the gums to the toxins secreted by the dental plaque bacteria. The gums will become red and swollen and bleed easily. This phenomenon is called "Pregnancy Gingivitis". To prevent it, the expectant mother should remove dental plaque adequately by toothbrushing so as to maintain good oral health.



b. Craving for sweet and sour food

Pregnant women may crave for sweet and sour food during pregnancy. However, bacteria in plaque will make use of the dietary sugar to produce acid and cause tooth decay. Moreover, minerals in the teeth may also be washed away by acidic food, thus reducing the thickness of the enamel.



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

- help repair the early tooth decay
- strengthen the enamel, making it more resistant to acid

attack

- prohibit the activities of the plaque bacteria so as to reduce the acid production by plaque

If the expectant mother craves for food, she should seek the dentist's advice concerning the effective ways of protecting her teeth, which may include the use of fluoridated mouthrinse to resist the acid attack by dental plaque.



5. Will tetracycline affect the foetus?

From the 4-6 weeks of pregnancy, the deciduous dentition of the foetus begins to form. Therefore, the intake of tetracycline, an antibiotic, by the expectant mother may lead to the deposition of tetracycline in the deciduous teeth, resulting in the teeth turning yellowish-brown or bluish-grey in colour. However, the discoloration depends on the type, duration and dosage of the tetracycline taken. Thus, it is necessary for the expectant mother to tell her doctor that she is pregnant so that he will prescribe medication appropriately.

