



## **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 have excellent oral health throughout her life and keep her teeth for a lifetime.

### **Puberty**

During puberty, sex hormones such as progesterone and estrogen cause increased blood circulation to the gums. This leads to sensitive gums and a greater reaction to any irritation, including food particles and plaque. During this time, the gums may become swollen, turn red, and feel tender.<sup>1</sup>

Adolescents with braces are at an increased risk for gingivitis, the first stage of periodontal disease (gum disease) that can lead to tooth loss. If untreated, gingivitis can lead to more serious gum problems later in life.<sup>1</sup> As a result, 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 all medications (including birth control pills) you are taking. It is extremely important for your dentist to know this information, especially when prescribing antibiotics. **Some antibiotics decrease the effectiveness of birth control pills.**

Continue to get preventive dental cleanings and annual exams during pregnancy. Untreated decayed teeth and gum infections such as periodontal disease put both a mother and her baby at risk. Gingivitis is the most common oral condition during pregnancy, occurring in 60 to 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 to provide the most comfort for the mother. 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 cavities, pregnant women should eat nutritious foods and avoid high sugar or empty calorie foods. Seek an obstetrician's nutritional guidance.



## 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.<sup>1</sup>

## 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.

## For more information

For more information, contact the Division of Public Health, Bureau of Oral Health and Dental Services, at 302-622-4540 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. 2020. Gum Disease and Women. In Retrieved July 16, 2020 from: <https://www.perio.org/consumer/gum-disease-and-women>
2. American Dental Association. 2020. Pregnancy Concerns. Mouth Healthy. Retrieved July 15, 2020 from: <http://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/pregnancy/concerns>

**24/7 Emergency Contact Number: 1-888-295-5156**

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