

Dental care for mother and baby

Mother.....

Due to hormone changes during pregnancy, some women's dental health needs closer attention. Gums may become inflamed during pregnancy and may bleed. A high standard of oral hygiene is therefore very important as is visiting your dentist regularly. This may also include visits to the dental hygienist for cleaning and advice.

There is no problem with attending for dental treatment during pregnancy, but professionals do advise that the removal and replacement of silver fillings should be delayed until after the baby is born where possible. Likewise some dentists think that you should not have a silver amalgam filling while you are breast feeding.

Your dentist may delay taking routine x-rays until after the pregnancy. Some treatment is unavoidable, and may require x-rays to be taken, such as root canal treatment.

There is no evidence that calcium deficiency during pregnancy causes tooth problems. When you are pregnant it is important to have a healthy balanced diet containing all the necessary vitamins and minerals. Good nutrition for the mother is important in the development of the baby's teeth. Calcium in particular is important, this can be found in milk, cheese and other dairy products. However you should avoid soft cheeses.

Women who suffer from morning sickness may want to eat little and often. Try to avoid sugary snacks and drinks to protect your teeth against decay. If you are often sick, rinse your mouth afterwards with plain water to prevent the acid attacking your teeth.

.....and baby.

Your baby should start teething at around 3 months old and will continue until all their 20 milk teeth have erupted into the mouth. At around 6 years old the first permanent teeth will come through, at the back of the baby teeth. This will continue until all the baby teeth are lost, and all the permanent teeth are in place (except wisdom teeth) by the age of 14.

Most babies suffer from teething pains. Babies may get a high temperature and their cheeks may appear red and warm to the touch. There are special teething gels that can be used. Some contain a mild painkiller and these can be massaged into the baby's gum. Teething rings can also help. Teething pains can vary and you can seek advice from your GP, dentist or health visitor.

Your dentist will advise you further, but it is usually best for your baby to come with you when you visit the dentist for a check-up as early as possible. This will get them used to a new and strange environment. Babies can have their dental examination done from 6 months onwards.

You should start cleaning your baby's teeth as soon as they start teething. They will probably need help with cleaning until the age of about 7 years or until manual dexterity is fully developed. At first you may find it easier to use a piece of gauze wrapped around your forefinger. As more teeth appear, you will need to use a baby toothbrush. Smear the brush with a non-fluoride toothpaste designed for babies, and gently massage it around the teeth and gums. It is important to clean teeth twice a day.

As your child grows, you can gradually give them more responsibility in cleaning their own teeth. Check with your dentist or health visitor if you have any worries or need more advice on cleaning your baby's teeth.

If you can, avoid using a dummy, and avoid thumb sucking. Never dip your baby's dummy or teething ring into fruit syrups, honey, fruit juices or anything containing sugar, particularly at bedtime. These can expose your baby's teeth to harmful acids which can attack the newly formed teeth and cause decay.

If your child's teeth become damaged contact your dentist immediately. It is not uncommon for a damaged tooth to discolour over time due to the trauma to it. If this happens outside normal surgery times, your dentist will have emergency cover. Telephone the surgery to find out who to call.