

# A Guide to Overall Care and Dental Health in Pregnancy



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## **ABSTRACT**

Pregnancy is a time of significant change for a woman's body, and maintaining overall health is crucial for both the mother and the developing baby. This guide emphasizes the importance of a well-rounded approach to pregnancy care, focusing on nutrition, exercise, and regular health checkups. It highlights the impact of a healthy lifestyle on pregnancy outcomes, from ensuring proper fetal development to keeping both the mother and baby strong. Special attention is given to the critical role of dental health, as hormonal changes during pregnancy can lead to increased risks of oral health issues like gum disease and cavities.



Oral health is often overlooked during pregnancy, yet it has a direct connection to overall health. This guide offers practical advice on maintaining optimal oral hygiene, managing common dental issues such as morning sickness, and the importance of regular dental visits. It also discusses the safe options for dental treatments during pregnancy and provides insights into managing oral care in each trimester. By following these essential tips, expecting mothers can safeguard their

dental health, prevent complications, and contribute to a healthier pregnancy experience for both themselves and their babies.

### **LET'S GET STARTED**

"A Guide to Overall Care and Dental Health in Pregnancy" provides a comprehensive approach to maintaining both physical and oral health during pregnancy. This guide stresses the importance of balanced nutrition, regular exercise, and proactive health monitoring for the well-being of both the expectant mother and her baby. It also underscores the need for a healthy lifestyle that supports a positive pregnancy outcome. With specific focus on oral health, it addresses common dental issues that arise due to hormonal changes, such as gum disease, cavities, and increased plaque buildup. By incorporating proper oral hygiene practices and understanding the connection between dental and overall health, this guide aims to ensure a smooth pregnancy journey.

The guide offers practical advice on maintaining optimal dental care throughout each trimester, managing pregnancy-related oral health challenges, and highlights the importance of regular dental checkups. It provides tips for dealing with morning sickness and other dental discomforts, while also offering insight into safe dental treatments during pregnancy. With clear and actionable steps, this guide empowers expecting mothers to prioritize their oral health alongside their general well-being, fostering a healthier, happier pregnancy for both mom and baby.

### **INTRODUCTION TO PREGNANCY CARE**

Pregnancy is a transformative time, filled with excitement and anticipation as a mother-to-be navigates the changes occurring in her body. It is essential to approach pregnancy care holistically, focusing on both physical and emotional well-being to support the health of the mother and the developing baby. Proper pregnancy care includes regular prenatal checkups, maintaining a balanced diet, staying active, and prioritizing rest. By addressing these foundational aspects, expectant mothers can foster a healthy environment for their baby's growth and development while ensuring their own health and comfort throughout the journey.

In addition to general care, it's important to remember that pregnancy can also impact specific areas of health, such as oral hygiene. Hormonal fluctuations during pregnancy can lead to an increased risk of dental issues, making it crucial to integrate oral health into overall pregnancy care. By understanding the interconnectedness of physical, mental, and oral health, pregnant women can make informed choices that benefit both their well-being and that of their baby. This guide will help expecting mothers navigate these essential aspects of care, providing valuable tips and advice for a healthy pregnancy experience.



### **IMPORTANCE OF OVERALL HEALTH DURING PREGNANCY**

Overall health during pregnancy is vital for the well-being of both the mother and the developing baby. A healthy pregnancy lays the foundation for a smoother delivery and promotes better outcomes for the baby, reducing the risks of complications such as preterm birth, low birth weight, and developmental issues. Maintaining overall health through proper nutrition, regular physical activity, and stress management supports the body's increased demands during pregnancy,

ensuring that both the mother's immune system and the baby's growth are optimized.

Additionally, a healthy lifestyle during pregnancy helps the mother cope with common discomforts such as fatigue, nausea, and swelling. By staying active and eating a balanced diet, the mother can manage her weight, improve circulation, and boost energy levels. Regular medical checkups and prenatal screenings allow healthcare providers to monitor both the mother's and baby's health, identifying potential risks early on. Prioritizing overall health during pregnancy ensures that the mother feels her best and can provide the ideal environment for her baby's development, fostering a strong foundation for both the pregnancy and the future.

### **THE CONNECTION BETWEEN ORAL HEALTH AND OVERALL PREGNANCY WELLNESS**

Oral health plays a significant role in overall pregnancy wellness, as the state of a mother's teeth and gums can directly impact her health and the development of her baby. Pregnancy hormones can increase the risk of oral health issues, such as gum disease (gingivitis) and cavities, due to changes in the body's immune system and increased blood flow to the gums. If left untreated, these dental problems can lead to complications such as gum infections, tooth decay, and even tooth loss. More importantly, oral health issues have been linked to increased risks of pregnancy complications, including premature birth, low birth weight, and gestational diabetes.

Maintaining good oral hygiene during pregnancy not only prevents these dental problems but also contributes to the overall health of both the mother and baby. Brushing and flossing regularly, eating a balanced diet rich in vitamins and minerals, and visiting the dentist for regular checkups are essential practices for pregnant women. Addressing oral health concerns early helps ensure a healthier pregnancy, supports the immune system, and reduces the risk of serious complications that can arise from untreated dental conditions. By prioritizing both



oral and general health, expecting mothers can enhance their pregnancy experience and promote better outcomes for their baby.

### **WAYS TO EASE ANXIETY DURING PREGNANCY**

If you're a soon-to-be parent feeling on edge about everything from the results of your next blood test to what color you're going to paint the baby's room, you're not alone. Research from the *Journal of Mental Health and Clinical Psychology* found that 20% of people reported onset of new anxiety during pregnancy. In many cases this anxiety is specifically about having a healthy pregnancy, delivery or baby, and is known as pregnancy-related anxiety.



Whether you're long acquainted with anxiety or are experiencing it for the first time, there is help out there, including professional counseling, medication,

acupuncture and more. Keep reading to better understand some of the symptoms and causes of anxiety during pregnancy, and options for coping mechanisms and treatment.

1. **Practice Deep Breathing:** Deep breathing exercises can help activate the body's relaxation response, lowering stress and calming the mind. Taking a few minutes each day to focus on your breath can make a noticeable difference in managing anxiety.

2. **Stay Active:** Light physical activity, such as walking, swimming, or prenatal yoga, can reduce stress hormones and increase endorphins, improving your mood. Regular exercise also promotes better sleep and overall well-being during pregnancy.

3. **Talk to Someone:** Sharing your fears and concerns with a trusted partner, friend, or therapist can provide emotional support and help you process your thoughts. Talking about your anxiety can reduce its intensity and make you feel less isolated.

4. **Create a Relaxing Routine:** Establishing a calming evening routine before bed can help reduce anxiety and prepare your body for sleep. Activities like reading, taking a warm bath, or practicing relaxation techniques can soothe your mind after a long day.

5. **Stay Informed:** Knowledge is power when it comes to pregnancy. Learning about the stages of pregnancy, what to expect, and how to manage common symptoms can reduce fear and anxiety caused by uncertainty. Reliable information gives you the confidence to navigate your pregnancy journey.

6. **Mindfulness and Meditation:** Practicing mindfulness or meditation can help you stay grounded and focused on the present moment. These techniques can reduce racing thoughts and promote a sense of calm, improving emotional balance during pregnancy.

7. **Get Enough Rest:** Adequate sleep is essential for both physical and emotional health. Lack of rest can heighten anxiety, so it's important to prioritize sleep and establish good sleep hygiene practices, such as maintaining a regular sleep schedule and creating a peaceful sleep environment.

## **MATERNITY CARE OPTIONS IN QUEENSLAND**

There are five main options for maternity care in Queensland. Please note that accesses to these maternity models depend on the services provided in your local area.

The five main options

- **Midwifery led continuity of care:** Your care is provided by a midwife or group of midwives and is provided in most public hospitals. Access to a hospital-based midwife care usually requires a GP referral. This model also enable midwives to provide care for women with complicated pregnancies by working collaboratively with doctors and other healthcare providers.
- **Private midwife care:** Your care is provided by a midwife or group of midwives from a private group practice for your pregnancy, birth and postnatal care. In this model you have the option of choosing whether to have your baby in hospital or at home.
- **GP share care:** Your care is shared between your GP and the local hospital doctors and midwives. Not all GPs provide maternity shared care so please check with your local GP whether this service is available.
- **Private obstetric care:** Your care is provided by an obstetrician who is a medical doctor specialised in caring for women with complicated pregnancies or special circumstances. If you choose to be cared for by a private obstetrician and birth in a private hospital a GP referral is required.
- **Public hospital maternity care:** Antenatal care is provided in hospital outpatient clinics (either onsite or outreach) by hospital-employed midwives and/or doctors. Care could also be provided by a multidisciplinary team dependent on the complexity of care needed. Collaborative intrapartum and postnatal care is provided in the hospital by midwives and doctors. Postnatal care may continue in the home or community by hospital midwives.

### **Models of Care**

The Office of the Chief Nursing and Midwifery Officer (OCNMO) commits to strengthening sustainable primary midwifery models of care that are responsive to women's and community needs through optimising professional midwifery resourcing.



The Office of the Chief Nurse and Midwife values and supports women being afforded the fundamental right to choice in their option of maternity care. We support midwives working in all models of care across public and private health care sectors and settings.



## **FOOD & NUTRITION TO INTAKW WHILE PREGNANCY**

While you're pregnant, you'll want to eat extra protein, calcium, iron, and essential vitamins. You can get these by eating a wide variety of lean meat, seafood, whole grains, and plant-based foods.

### Food & Nutrition to Intake While Pregnancy

1. Folic Acid: Folic acid is crucial for preventing neural tube defects and supporting the baby's brain and spinal cord development. Foods rich in folate include leafy greens, citrus fruits, beans, lentils, and fortified cereals.

2. **Protein:** Protein is essential for the growth and development of the baby's tissues, including muscles and organs. Include lean meats, fish, eggs, dairy products, tofu, and legumes in your diet for adequate protein intake.
3. **Calcium:** Calcium helps build strong bones and teeth for both the mother and the baby. Good sources of calcium include dairy products (milk, yogurt, cheese), fortified plant milks, leafy greens like kale, and fortified cereals.
4. **Iron:** Iron supports healthy blood production and helps prevent anemia during pregnancy. You can find iron in red meat, poultry, fish, lentils, spinach, and fortified cereals. Pairing iron-rich foods with vitamin C sources, like citrus fruits, enhances absorption.
5. **Healthy Fats:** Healthy fats, especially omega-3 fatty acids, support the baby's brain development. Include sources of healthy fats such as avocados, nuts, seeds, and oily fish like salmon, sardines, and mackerel.
6. **Vitamin D:** Vitamin D is essential for calcium absorption and bone health. You can get vitamin D through sun exposure, fortified dairy products, fatty fish, and eggs. A supplement may be recommended if you have low levels.
7. **Fiber:** Fiber helps prevent constipation, which is common during pregnancy. Whole grains, fruits, vegetables, beans, and legumes are excellent sources of fiber to keep digestion smooth.
8. **Water:** Staying hydrated is crucial during pregnancy to support the increased blood volume and amniotic fluid. Drinking plenty of water helps maintain amniotic fluid levels and supports digestion, preventing dehydration and swelling.
9. **Vitamin C:** Vitamin C boosts the immune system and aids in iron absorption. Include citrus fruits, strawberries, bell peppers, and tomatoes in your diet for a good dose of vitamin C.
10. **B Vitamins:** B vitamins, particularly B6, help reduce nausea and support the nervous system. Good sources include poultry, fish, bananas, potatoes, and fortified cereals.
11. **Zinc:** Zinc is essential for cell growth, immune function, and tissue repair. It supports the development of your baby's nervous system and helps in the healing

process. Foods rich in zinc include meat, shellfish, legumes, seeds, and whole grains.

12. Magnesium: Magnesium helps maintain healthy muscles and nerves and can alleviate pregnancy-related leg cramps. It also supports bone health and promotes relaxation. Sources of magnesium include leafy greens, nuts, seeds, whole grains, and legumes.

13. Iodine: Iodine is important for proper thyroid function and brain development. It supports the production of thyroid hormones, which regulate metabolism. Pregnant women can get iodine from iodized salt, dairy products, eggs, seafood, and seaweed.

By incorporating these key nutrients into your diet, you'll support your health and provide your baby with the essential building blocks for healthy development. Always consult with your healthcare provider or a nutritionist to ensure you're meeting your specific dietary needs during pregnancy.

### **ORAL HEALTH DURING PREGNANCY: KEEPING MOM AND BABY HEALTHY**

Pregnancy is the time to celebrate your first step into motherhood. It is common to get bombarded with advice on managing your health and eating a balanced diet. It is a good thing to listen to your doctor and follow what suits your body. Besides focusing on staying fit and happy, you need to keep a check on your dental health. Many women suffer from oral health problems during this period because of changing hormones that increase the risk of plaque.

If plaque develops into cavities and gum disease, it can impact the health of the baby. It has been found that pregnant women who suffer from periodontitis can give birth to premature or underweight babies. Let us help you understand oral health during pregnancy and ways of keeping mom and baby healthy. It is vital for expecting mothers to learn how to keep their mouths and babies healthy.

## **1. Pregnancy and Dental Health**

Pregnancy causes hormonal changes in the body that make your teeth vulnerable to cavities and increase the chances of gingivitis. Exhaustion and nausea can also contribute to a dirty mouth. Many mothers-to-be suffer from bleeding gums due to this change. If it is left unchecked, it can turn into periodontitis, which can cause bone loss in most severe cases.

Another dental problem that can surface during this period is pregnancy epulis, a small red growth on the gum that can bleed. In addition, excessive bacteria in the mother's mouth can enter the bloodstream from the gums and reach the uterus, resulting in premature birth. The bacteria can also be passed on to the babies from mothers and affect the newborn's gums and primary teeth.

## **2. Maintaining Oral Health During Pregnancy**

Expecting mothers must be extra cautious about their dental health because of the increased risk of cavities and gum problems. They must brush twice a day and floss once, without making any exceptions to this rule. They should also visit their professional dentist in Hope Island to get their teeth checked for any hidden problems.

They must inform the practitioner about pregnancy and the medicines they are taking before undergoing any treatment. It is safe to get a dental x-ray or use a numbing agent on teeth if required. It is vital to maintain optimum hygiene, even if the gums are inflamed, with the help of an ultra-soft toothbrush. Quit smoking and alcohol consumption during pregnancy, as they affect the baby's health. Speak to your dentist about these issues and find solutions with their help.

## **3. Impact of Vomiting on Oral Health**

Most women experience morning sickness and nausea during pregnancy. The reason behind this is the hormonal changes that make it hard to keep food in the stomach. Frequent vomiting affects oral health because of the acids that come in contact with teeth. Gastric reflux can damage tooth enamel and increase the probability of developing cavities.

Dentists in Hope Island suggest rinsing the mouth after vomiting with a fluoride-based mouthwash instead of brushing, which can cause tooth erosion. They also advise applying fluoride toothpaste on teeth and rinse with plain water. Moms-to-be can chew sugar-free gum to reduce the impact of acids and should brush after an hour of throwing up.

#### **4. Preventing Gagging While Brushing**

Since nausea is a common problem during the first trimester and in the second trimester for some women, gagging while brushing is normal. However, it becomes a problem because it prevents expecting moms from cleaning their back teeth and leads to cavities. Thus, they must use a small brush (baby toothbrush) with soft bristles to clean the teeth slowly.

Avoid rushing through the process, and be gentle with the cleaning part to prevent gagging. To distract yourself, stop looking into the mirror and focus on something more important. If you want to relax your mind, listen to music or watch TV. If you feel the toothpaste is causing nausea, ask your dentist for a substitute.

#### **5. Avoid Junk Food Cravings During Pregnancy**

Food cravings during pregnancy can become problematic if you are consuming junk and sweet foods and drinks. Excessive sugar intake is bad for the teeth and overall health. It can affect the baby by increasing foetal weight, creating labour problems.

If you crave savouries and sugary foods, opt for sweet fruits and rinse your mouth with water after eating them. Hope Island dentists suggest eating rich foods with natural sweetness, like Greek yoghurt and nuts. In addition, eating small, healthy meals throughout the day can help keep the cravings at bay.

#### **6. Foods to Eat For Healthy Mom and Baby**

Pregnant women must increase their intake of calcium and vitamin D for the healthy development of the baby. Calcium helps to strengthen bones and vitamin D aids in this process. Thus, meals must include dairy products like milk, yoghurt, cheese and almonds.

Vegans can consume calcium through almond milk, calcium-fortified soy, broccoli, and baked beans. Vitamin D can be absorbed by the body naturally through sun exposure. Foods that contain the vitamin include eggs, cereals, breads, salmon, mackerel, etc. A balanced diet ensures optimum health for the mom and baby.

### **Wrapping Up**

Pregnant women must maintain a healthy and active lifestyle. They must care for their teeth more to prevent cavities and problems caused by gagging and vomiting. Visiting your dentist in Hope Island is essential to know the status of your oral health and maintain it optimally.

## **RECOGNIZING SIGNS OF DENTAL PROBLEMS DURING PREGNANCY**

1. Gum Sensitivity and Bleeding: Swollen, red, or bleeding gums, especially when brushing or flossing, may indicate pregnancy gingivitis. This condition is common due to hormonal changes and should be addressed with proper oral care and regular dentist visits.
2. Persistent Bad Breath: If you experience bad breath that doesn't go away despite regular brushing and mouthwash use, it could signal gum disease or a buildup of plaque, which can affect both your dental and overall health during pregnancy.
3. Tooth Sensitivity: Increased tooth sensitivity, particularly to hot, cold, or sweet foods and drinks, may be a sign of enamel erosion or cavities. Pregnancy-related acid reflux or vomiting can also contribute to this sensitivity.
4. Swollen or Painful Jaw: Pain or swelling in the jaw could indicate a dental infection or an abscess. This is a serious condition that should be treated promptly to avoid complications for both mother and baby.
5. Changes in Taste: Some women experience a change in taste due to pregnancy hormones, which can make foods taste metallic or bitter. This can be a temporary issue but may sometimes lead to neglecting oral hygiene due to discomfort.



6. **Dry Mouth:** A dry mouth can result from hormonal changes, dehydration, or pregnancy-related nausea and vomiting. Saliva helps protect against cavities and gum disease, so a lack of saliva may increase the risk of dental issues.

7. **Cavities or Tooth Decay:** If you notice dark spots or holes in your teeth, it could be a sign of tooth decay, which can be exacerbated by pregnancy cravings, poor dietary habits, or frequent vomiting due to morning sickness.

If you experience any of these symptoms, it's important to consult with your dentist to prevent further complications. Regular dental checkups during pregnancy are essential for maintaining both your oral health and overall well-being.



### **WHEN TO SEEK DENTAL TREATMENT DURING PREGNANCY**

1. **Gum Bleeding or Swelling:** If you notice your gums bleeding or swelling, especially when brushing or flossing, it could be a sign of gingivitis, which is common during pregnancy. If symptoms persist or worsen, seek dental treatment to avoid gum disease or infection.

2. **Persistent Tooth Pain:** Severe tooth pain that doesn't go away can indicate a cavity, tooth infection, or other dental issue. Ignoring it can lead to more serious complications, so it's essential to visit the dentist for an evaluation.

3. **Tooth Sensitivity:** If your teeth become overly sensitive to hot, cold, or sweet foods and drinks, it may be a sign of enamel erosion or cavities. Seek treatment if the sensitivity continues, as it could worsen if left untreated.

4. **Swollen or Painful Jaw:** Any pain or swelling in the jaw could signal an abscess or infection. This requires immediate dental attention to prevent the spread of infection, which can impact your overall health.

5. **Morning Sickness-Related Erosion:** Frequent vomiting due to morning sickness can lead to tooth enamel erosion. If you experience this, talk to your dentist about preventive measures, such as fluoride treatments or recommendations on when and how to brush after vomiting.

6. **Dry Mouth:** Dry mouth, which can occur due to hormonal changes, dehydration, or pregnancy medications, can increase the risk of cavities and gum disease. If you have a dry mouth that persists, it's important to seek advice from your dentist for solutions.

7. **Changes in Taste:** Significant changes in taste or a metallic taste in your mouth might be a sign of underlying dental issues. If this sensation is persistent or causes discomfort, consult your dentist for an evaluation.

8. **Cavities or Dark Spots:** If you notice any dark spots or holes in your teeth, it may indicate cavities. Left untreated, cavities can lead to infection or more extensive dental work, so prompt dental attention is recommended.

Remember, regular dental visits during pregnancy are important to ensure that both your oral health and overall health are well-managed. Always inform your dentist that you are pregnant so they can take necessary precautions during treatments and provide the safest care for you and your baby.

## **POST PREGNANCY DENTAL CARE AND OVERALL BODY CARE**

### **Dental Care**

1. **Regular Brushing and Flossing:** After pregnancy, it's important to continue with a good oral hygiene routine. Brush your teeth twice a day with fluoride toothpaste and floss daily to prevent plaque buildup and cavities. Hormonal changes may have made your gums more sensitive during pregnancy, so it's crucial to keep them healthy to avoid gum disease.

2. **Monitor for Cavities or Sensitivity:** Many women experience tooth sensitivity or cavities during or after pregnancy due to changes in diet, acidity from morning sickness, or neglecting oral care. If you notice pain or sensitivity in your teeth, consult with your dentist for early detection and treatment.

3. Gum Care: Pregnancy can lead to gum issues such as gingivitis. After childbirth, continue to monitor for any signs of swollen, bleeding, or sore gums. Regular checkups with your dentist can help manage any lingering gum problems and ensure that your oral health is in good shape.

4. Dental Checkups: Schedule a visit to the dentist post-pregnancy, ideally around six weeks after childbirth, to ensure your teeth and gums are healthy. This is a great time to address any oral health concerns that arose during pregnancy, such as cavities, gum disease, or teeth grinding.



### **Overall Body Care**

1. Postpartum Nutrition: After giving birth, your body needs nutrients to recover and support breastfeeding. Focus on a balanced diet rich in proteins, vitamins, and minerals, particularly calcium and iron, to replenish your body and support your baby's needs.

2. Exercise and Physical Activity: Start with light exercises or postpartum yoga to help regain strength, reduce stress, and improve circulation. Physical activity can also alleviate postpartum symptoms like back pain or fatigue, but make sure to consult your healthcare provider before starting any exercise routine.

3. **Hydration:** Staying hydrated is crucial, especially if you are breastfeeding. Drinking plenty of water supports milk production and helps prevent dehydration, which can affect both your physical and skin health.

4. **Rest and Recovery:** Adequate rest is essential for your recovery after childbirth. Try to sleep when your baby sleeps and ask for help when needed. Adequate rest supports healing, hormone regulation, and overall well-being.

5. **Pelvic Floor Exercises:** Strengthening your pelvic floor muscles post-pregnancy can help prevent issues such as incontinence. Kegel exercises are simple and effective for rebuilding strength and toning the pelvic region.

6. **Mental Health Care:** Taking care of your mental health is just as important as your physical health. Postpartum depression or anxiety is common, so be sure to reach out to a healthcare professional if you experience any emotional challenges. Talking to someone and practicing self-care can help improve your emotional well-being.



By maintaining good dental hygiene and taking steps to care for your body after pregnancy, you can ensure a healthy and smooth recovery. Always consult with your healthcare provider and dentist for personalized care based on your specific needs.

## **CONCLUSION**

Maintaining both overall health and dental hygiene during pregnancy is essential for the well-being of both the mother and the developing baby. Pregnancy brings unique challenges, including hormonal changes that can affect oral health, increasing the risk of gum disease, cavities, and other dental issues. However, by practicing good oral hygiene, staying hydrated, and maintaining a balanced diet rich in vitamins and minerals, mothers can prevent many of these common issues. Regular dental check-ups are crucial during this time to address any problems early and ensure that both the mother's and baby's health remain on track.



Equally important is caring for your overall health during pregnancy. Staying active, managing stress, and getting enough rest are key factors in supporting a healthy pregnancy. Focusing on good nutrition, hydration, and mental well-being will not only help the mother recover after childbirth but also promote a healthy environment for the baby's development. By taking proactive steps in both oral

and overall care, expecting mothers can navigate pregnancy with greater ease and confidence, leading to a healthier, happier outcome for both mother and child.

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