



THE NATIONAL CENTER ON  
Health



# Brush Up on Oral Health

December 2012

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## Did You Know?

Pregnancy is an important and exciting time in a woman's life. Keeping the teeth and gums healthy during pregnancy is one way to stay healthy.



## Receiving Oral Health Care During Pregnancy Is Safe and Important

It is safe and important to get oral health care during pregnancy. Pregnant women can safely have their teeth cleaned and have X-rays taken and cavities filled. It is often recommended that oral health care be delivered during the second trimester because it's most comfortable for the woman.

Preventing oral disease can help keep women healthy during pregnancy. Preventing oral disease is also important because oral disease can be transmitted from mother to baby through saliva. Transmitting the bacteria that causes oral disease usually happens from the mother testing the temperature of a bottle

with her mouth and then giving the bottle to her baby, placing her baby's pacifier or bottle nipple in her mouth to clean it and then giving it to her baby, or sharing a fork or spoon with her baby.

This issue of *Brush Up on Oral Health* focuses on oral health for pregnant women and what Head Start staff can do to help women stay healthy during pregnancy.

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## **Pregnancy and Oral Health: Truth or Fiction?**

Many beliefs related to pregnancy and oral health have passed from generation to generation. A common belief is that women lose a tooth with each pregnancy. But with good oral hygiene and professional oral health care, pregnant women's teeth can stay healthy.

Another common belief is that the unborn baby takes calcium from a woman's teeth, which causes tooth decay. This is not true. During pregnancy, women may be at greater risk for developing tooth decay because they eat more frequently to prevent nausea. Tooth decay is 100 percent preventable. But, if left untreated, tooth decay can cause toothaches and can lead to tooth loss.

When women are pregnant, their bodies go through complicated changes. Many notice that their gums are sore, puffy, and prone to bleeding. These are symptoms of gingivitis, an infection of the gum tissue. Anyone can develop gingivitis. But pregnant women are at higher risk for gingivitis because of hormonal changes. If gingivitis is not treated, it may lead to a more serious gum disease that can, in turn, lead to tooth loss.

The best way for pregnant women to prevent tooth decay and gingivitis is to keep their teeth and gums clean. Brushing with fluoridated toothpaste twice a day, flossing once a day, and getting a professional dental cleaning is the best way to keep pregnant women's teeth and gums healthy. Avoiding foods that are high in sugar also helps. If tooth decay is present, treatment in a dental office is the only way it can be stopped.

If tooth decay and gingivitis are prevented or treated, there is no reason for pregnant women to lose teeth.

## Helping Pregnant Women Stay Healthy

Because families trust and respect Head Start staff, staff play an important role in helping pregnant women keep their mouths healthy. Some things Head Start staff can do include:

- Talk to women about why having healthy teeth and gums is important
- Tell women that the bacteria that causes oral disease can be transmitted to their baby through saliva if their mouth is not free of disease
- Reassure women that receiving oral health care from an oral health professional during pregnancy is safe
- Ask women if they have any concerns about seeking care (for example, fear of going to the dentist), and talk to them about each concern
- Find out if women have dental insurance, and help them fill out paperwork to enroll in Medicaid or other insurance plans
- Help women find a dental office where they can get care (See [Finding Low-Cost Dental Care](#))
- Offer women suggestions for healthy foods for meals and snacks
- Encourage women to brush with fluoridated toothpaste twice a day and floss once a day
- Show women how to brush and floss to keep teeth and gums healthy
- Provide women with educational materials, such as [Two Healthy Smiles: Tips to Keep You and Your Baby Healthy](#) (available in English and Spanish)

## Cook's Corner: Recipes for Healthy Snacks

Here's a delicious healthy snack that pregnant women can make for themselves and their families.

### Yogurt Parfait

#### Ingredients

- 1 cup low-fat or non-fat plain or vanilla yogurt
- 1/2 cup low-fat granola (optional)
- 1 cup fresh fruit (such as strawberries, bananas, blueberries, or raspberries)

#### Instructions

1. Wash and dry the fruit. If needed, slice the fruit into bite-size pieces.
2. Place 1/4 cup of the yogurt in the bottom of two small glasses.



3. Sprinkle 1 tablespoon of granola over the yogurt in each glass.
4. Put 1/4 cup of the sliced fruit over the granola in each glass.
5. Repeat the layers.

Makes two yogurt parfaits.

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