



THE NATIONAL CENTER ON  
Health



# Brush Up on Oral Health

## May 2015

- **Promoting Oral Health During Pregnancy**
- **Barriers to Seeking or Receiving Oral Health Care During Pregnancy**
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## Did You Know?

- Four out of 10 pregnant women have tooth decay and/or gum disease.
- Pregnant women ages 15 to 24 are less likely to go to the dentist than pregnant women who are older.



### Promoting Oral Health During Pregnancy

Taking care of teeth and gums is important for pregnant women's oral health and overall health. It also is important for babies' oral health, as mothers with poor oral health can pass the bacteria that cause tooth decay to their babies. See the [December 2012](#) issue of *Brush Up on Oral Health* for more information about helping women stay healthy during pregnancy.

This issue highlights some reasons women may not seek or receive oral health care when they are pregnant. It offers strategies Head Start staff can use to help pregnant women achieve good oral health. A recipe for a healthy snack that can be eaten in the Head Start classroom or at home also is included.

### Barriers to Seeking or Receiving Oral Health Care During Pregnancy

It is important to find out why some women enrolled in Head Start do not seek or receive oral health care during pregnancy. Head Start staff can use this information to help pregnant women overcome the barriers they face. Common barriers include:

- Having had painful or negative dental visits in the past
- Believing that tooth decay and bleeding gums are normal during pregnancy and that they don't affect the mother's overall health
- Worries that dental X-rays, local anesthesia, pain medications, or dental treatment may hurt the baby
- Inability to find a dentist willing to provide oral health care to pregnant women
- Not knowing that many state Medicaid programs pay for oral health care during pregnancy

### Strategies Head Start Staff Can Use to Help Pregnant Women Achieve Good Oral Health



- **Provide Education.** Reassure women that it is safe to receive oral health care during pregnancy. Provide information about oral health problems that may arise during pregnancy and what women can do to prevent them. Use creative approaches to share this information. For example, host an oral health baby shower or arrange an “ask a dentist/dental hygienist” event for pregnant women. Or use motivational interviewing (MI) to encourage pregnant women to improve their oral health. See the [November 2014](#) issue of *Brush Up on Oral Health* for more information about MI.

There are many educational materials available for Head Start staff to share with pregnant women. These include *Get the Facts About Oral Health* ([English](#) and [Spanish \(español\)](#)), *Tips for Good Oral Health During Pregnancy* ([English](#) and [Spanish \(español\)](#)), and *Two Healthy Smiles: Tips to Keep You and Your Baby Healthy* ([English](#) and [Spanish \(español\)](#)).

- **Know Dental Insurance Options.** Know the Medicaid coverage and eligibility requirements for pregnant women in their state. Check with local health and social service agencies to see if other types of dental insurance or oral health programs for pregnant women are available in the community. Keep a list of local dental offices or clinics that provide oral health care for pregnant women and those that accept Medicaid patients. Update the list every year.
- **Provide Case Management.** Identify and help women overcome barriers in seeking and receiving oral health care during pregnancy. For example, encourage pregnant women to make an appointment for a dental visit or help arrange transportation to and from the dental office or clinic. Pay attention to possible emotional concerns, such as fear of dental procedures or a lack of confidence in ability to communicate with oral health staff. Consider setting up group dental visits where two or more pregnant women have a dental

visit at the same time. See the [November 2013](#) issue of *Brush Up on Oral Health* for more information about case management.

- **Establish Partnerships.** Build relationships with local organizations that provide health and education services to pregnant women. This could include the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC); local health departments and community clinics, local dental and obstetrics and gynecology societies; and organizations that offer prenatal classes. Working in partnership allows for the chance to share information about the importance of oral health during pregnancy with local organizations. They can then share this information with pregnant women they serve.

### Cook's Corner: Cottage Cheese and Apples

Here's a delicious healthy snack that children can make as a class project or at home with their families.

#### Ingredients

½ apple

½ cup low-fat cottage cheese

#### Directions

1. Cut apple into bite-size pieces and place in a small bowl.
2. Top cottage cheese with apple pieces.



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