



## Women And Oral Health

For every stage of a woman's life there are unique health challenges to consider. Oral health is no exception, as it is affected by changes in habits and hormones that only women may experience.

### Oral health and puberty

During puberty, a surge in hormones may cause swollen gums, especially during menstruation. Mouth lesions and ulcers can also develop, and girls may experience sensitive gums that are more easily irritated.<sup>1</sup>

### Contraceptives and medication

Oral contraceptives may promote gingivitis since they mimic pregnancy and contain progesterone or estrogen. Women who use birth control pills are more likely to develop a dry socket after tooth extraction and should consult their dentist before scheduling major dental procedures.<sup>1</sup> Diet pills and certain medications can decrease salivary flow, putting adults at risk for cavities or gum disease.

### Pregnancy and periodontal disease

Pregnancy may increase inflammation of the gums, and if plaque isn't removed regularly, gingivitis can occur that may lead to periodontitis. Studies indicate that women with periodontal disease may be at risk for pre-term, low birth weight babies. Morning sickness may also cause tooth erosion due to increased acid from vomiting. To neutralize the acid, rub a paste of baking soda and water on the teeth.<sup>1</sup>

### Menopause and oral health

When menopause begins, some women experience dry mouth, burning sensations in their gums and changes in taste. Gums can become sore and sensitive, and hormone replacement therapy may cause gums to bleed, swell and become red.

### Smoking in women

If you use tobacco products, you are at an increased risk for periodontal disease and oral cancers.<sup>2</sup> Oral cancer, when left untreated, may lead to life-threatening consequences, so it's even more important to see the dentist regularly if you use tobacco.<sup>3</sup>

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As caregivers, women may put the health of their families above their own health. Make sure to take care of yourself so you are healthy enough to care for your loved ones.

<sup>1</sup>"Why Is Oral Health Important for Women?", Academy of General Dentistry, [www.knowyourteeth.com/infobites/abc/article/?abc=W&iid=341&aid=1369](http://www.knowyourteeth.com/infobites/abc/article/?abc=W&iid=341&aid=1369), accessed 4/2017.

<sup>2</sup>"How to ease a baby's teething pain", American Academy of Pediatrics, [www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/baby/teething-tooth-care/Pages/Teething-Pain.aspx](http://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/baby/teething-tooth-care/Pages/Teething-Pain.aspx), accessed 4/2017.

<sup>3</sup>"CHAPTER\_1291.1: Oral Health and Heart Disease Facts", Academy of General Dentistry, [www.knowyourteeth.com/infobites/abc/article/?abc=&iid=320&aid=4307](http://www.knowyourteeth.com/infobites/abc/article/?abc=&iid=320&aid=4307), accessed 4/2017.