

# 10 Things You Should Know About Oral Health

## Information for New and Expectant Mothers

By John P. Rossetti, DMD and Amy Seif  
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The old adage, “For every baby, a tooth” addresses the notion that pregnancy causes tooth loss. There is no justification for tooth loss due to a decline in a mother’s oral health. With reasonable and proper care prior to and during pregnancy, new mothers can avoid oral health problems while protecting the oral health of her child.

Dental disease is an infectious disease. Transmission of cavity-causing bacteria can occur between a mother and her baby. Therefore, mothers play an important role in preventing dental disease. The following are 10 things every expectant or new mother should know:

1. **Visit the dentist.** An expectant mother should visit her dentist soon after learning she is pregnant. Reducing the mother’s cavity-causing bacteria will reduce the amount of cavity-causing bacteria passed to the baby.
2. **Take vitamins.** The baby’s developing teeth depend on the mother’s proper intake of important minerals and vitamins. Eat balanced meals and remember to take the vitamins prescribed by a doctor daily.
3. **Check the status of community drinking water.** Parents should find out about the fluoride status of their drinking water. If the water supply is not fluoridated, parents should ask their dental provider about fluoride supplementation.
4. **Clean baby’s mouth.** Even before the first tooth erupts, clean baby’s gums with a cloth after every meal. Beginning with the first tooth, clean baby’s teeth with a soft brush. Teeth should be brushed with a pea-sized amount of fluoridated toothpaste starting at 12 months. Cleaning the gums and brushing the teeth early encourage children to develop good oral hygiene habits and can be useful in preventing early childhood caries.
5. **Take baby to the dentist.** A baby’s teeth usually come in between six and twelve months of age. This is an excellent time to bring baby in for its first dental visit. A good dentist wants to see baby teeth early and regularly.
6. **Take care of baby teeth.** A common misconception among parents is that a child’s baby teeth are not important. Baby teeth serve as “placeholders” for permanent teeth, help a child to chew properly, develop proper speech and a beautiful smile.
7. **Prevent early childhood caries.** Early childhood caries, or baby bottle tooth decay, is caused by frequent and prolonged exposure of a child’s teeth to sugar and *Streptococcus mutans*—a cavity-causing bacteria. This exposure is often the result of putting a child to bed with a bottle containing sugary liquid (including milk, formula, or fruit juice) or allowing a child to drink “at will” from a bottle during the day. The most important way to reduce the risk of early childhood caries is to never put a baby to bed with a bottle and encourage baby to drink water. Wean a baby from a bottle as early as possible to promote good oral health. Most children are ready to begin using a cup between six and nine months of age.
8. **Special considerations for children with special health care needs.** Some children born with special health care needs, such as cleft lip and cleft palate, have their own special concerns. For example, an increased intake of sweetened medications may make these children more susceptible to dental decay. Parents can ask their oral health provider for suggestions for alternative medication or preventive intervention to minimize effects.
9. **Prevent oral/facial injuries.** Parents should not allow their babies to use walkers due to considerable risk of injuries to the head and face, and should request that family members not give them as gifts. In addition, the use of car seats and safe use of shopping carts can prevent many situations that place a child’s oral health at risk.
10. **Encourage healthy eating habits.** It is never too early to encourage healthy eating habits that will also benefit good oral health. Introduce baby to healthy and unsweetened snacks that do not promote tooth decay.

### Some people should see a dentist more often than others

People who should see a dentist every six months are:

- children who are one year old and still using a bottle;
- children age six or seven years who have not had sealants placed on their teeth;
- children age 12 or 13 years who have not had sealants placed on their teeth;
- pregnant women;
- people who have diabetes; and
- people who have heart disease.



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*Bright Futures in Practice: Oral Health* is a guide that addresses the oral health needs of children ages 0-21 by presenting guidelines on oral health promotion and disease prevention and other preventive strategies and tools.

The guide is designed for many health and education professionals, including dental professionals, physicians, nurses, nutritionists, educators, and child care providers. The information in this guide can also be adapted for use with families.

For more information on Bright Futures, go to their Web site at <http://www.brightfutures.org>

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