



Brush Up on Oral Health

Pregnancy and Oral Health

Pregnancy is an exciting time in a woman's life. It is safe and important to get oral health care during pregnancy. For example, pregnant women can have their teeth cleaned, have X-rays taken, and receive treatment. Preventing oral disease can help keep women healthy during pregnancy.

This issue of *Brush Up on Oral Health* talks about oral health concerns during pregnancy and offers tips for Head Start staff to help pregnant women keep their mouths healthy. It also offers a recipe for a healthy snack to make in the Head Start classroom or at home.



Oral Health Concerns During and After Pregnancy

Many pregnant women develop pregnancy gingivitis (gum disease). Signs of gingivitis include red, swollen gums that bleed when brushing or flossing. During pregnancy, women's hormones change making gums more sensitive to the bacteria that cause gum disease. If pregnancy gingivitis is not treated, the infection can cause a woman to lose teeth and can impact her overall health.

After the baby is born, a mother with untreated tooth decay has more bacteria that cause tooth decay than a mother who has a healthy mouth. This bacteria can be passed from the mother to her baby through saliva sharing activities, such as when the mother tests the temperature of a bottle with her mouth and then gives the bottle to her baby, places her baby's pacifier or bottle nipple in her mouth to clean it, or shares a fork or spoon with her baby. Babies who get the bacteria early in their life are much more likely to develop tooth decay in their primary (baby) teeth and permanent teeth than babies who get the bacteria later.

We Would Like to Know

- Please tell us what you think about *Brush Up on Oral Health* and how you use it.
- What topics would you like to learn more about and what are your ideas to improve the tip sheet?
- Select the link to go to the feedback form <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/buoh2019>.

Tips for Head Start Staff to Help Pregnant Women Keep a Healthy Mouth

1. Brush twice a day with fluoride toothpaste.

Remind pregnant women that brushing with a soft bristled toothbrush and fluoride toothpaste in the morning and before bed removes bacteria that cause oral disease.

2. Floss once a day. Help pregnant women understand that flossing once a day removes bacteria from the sides of teeth where a toothbrush cannot reach. This is especially important for keeping gums healthy. Invite a dental hygienist or dentist to the program to show pregnant women the best method for flossing and give feedback to improve their flossing technique.

3. Consume healthy foods and beverages. Consuming healthy foods and beverages, especially those low in sugar, helps keep pregnant women healthy. Teach pregnant women how to read nutrition labels to identify foods and beverages high in sugar. Remind them to drink fluoridated water throughout the day.

4. Receive oral health care. Help pregnant women find a dentist if they don't have one. Ask for a referral to a dentist from the woman's physician, the local or [state health department](#), the local or state dental association, social service professionals, or the state [dental hygienist liaison](#), also available in [Spanish \(español\)](#). [Healthy Habits for Happy Smiles: Getting Oral Health Care While You Are Pregnant](#), available in [Spanish \(español\)](#), also offers strategies for getting oral health care during pregnancy.

5. Tackle morning sickness. Many women feel sick or vomit during pregnancy, especially during the first three months. Many times, having small snacks throughout the day helps. But this can increase a pregnant woman's risk of developing tooth decay. Encourage pregnant women to choose healthy foods low in sugar or to brush more than twice a day. For women who vomit often, urge them to rinse with a teaspoon of baking soda mixed in a cup of warm water to stop stomach acids from attacking their teeth.

6. Role-play a dental visit. Role-playing can help relieve fears that pregnant women may have about dental visits. Prepare a script with the woman where she tells the dental team that she is pregnant and when her baby is due. Work with her to develop questions that cover any concerns or questions she has about getting care while pregnant. Invite a dentist or dental hygienist to participate in the role-playing activity.



Cook's Corner: Fruity Candy Corn Parfait

Here is a delicious and healthy snack that children can make in a Head Start classroom or at home with their families.

Ingredients

- 1 cup pineapple chunks
- 1 cup orange slices, cut into chunks
- 1 cup low-fat plain yogurt

Directions

1. Layer the pineapple chunks, then the orange chunks in a small glass.
2. Spoon yogurt on top of the fruit.

Makes four servings

Safety tip: An adult should slice the ingredients.



Contact Us

The National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness welcomes your feedback on this issue, as well as your suggestions for topics for future issues. Please forward your comments to health@ecetta.info or call 866-763-6481.

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School readiness begins with health!



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