

OBs: Have You Asked About Dental Visits?

Pregnant women and mothers of babies and young children are focused on so many things that they may not consider the importance of oral health. When seeing these patients, OBs can open the discussion by asking, **“Have you seen your dentist this year?”**

There is a growing body of evidence that oral health care may have an impact on pregnancy health and outcomes, specifically untreated periodontal disease. It has also been established that the bacteria associated with untreated dental caries cross the placental barrier, and actually predispose newborns to having cavities as their teeth develop.

Since patients may experience bleeding gums and pregnancy gingivitis due to hormonal changes, please remind them that these issues are caused by bacteria in the mouth and are preventable with good hygiene, a reduced-sugar diet, and regular dental care. Preventing cavities and gum disease with regular and early visits saves money by eliminating the need for expensive dental treatments later on.

Educate patients on the following important steps to take:

- Brush and floss twice a day for two minutes (“2 x 2”) with fluoride toothpaste.
- Limit sugary drinks (juice, soda, sports drinks) and sticky, sugary snacks.
- Schedule dental checkups every six months (or more frequently if recommended by a dentist).

Let your patients know that dental care (including exams, cleanings, and X-rays with shielding) is safe during pregnancy — and recommended. Moreover, untreated problems can cause health issues for moms and their babies. For example, teeth may become weak from acid reflux or vomiting due to morning sickness.

Encourage your patients to combat this problem by:

- Rinsing with water, mouthwash, or fluoride rinse immediately after vomiting.
- Waiting 10 – 15 minutes to brush after vomiting. Enamel is weaker during that time due to recent stomach acid exposure and can be worn away by brushing.

Source: http://health.ri.gov/programs/detail.php?pgm_id=23



AmeriHealth Caritas Pennsylvania and AmeriHealth Caritas Northeast have created the Circle of Care value-based program for participating OB/GYN providers. The goal of the program is to facilitate more dental care for maternity members to further improve health and overall well-being for them.



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