

Maintaining Periodontal Health Throughout a Woman's Life

-Menstruation

During menstruation, some women may experience menstrual gingivitis. This condition presents itself during ovulation or pre-menstruation and may cause gingival (gum) bleeding, redness or swelling of the gums between the teeth, sores on the inside of the lip and cheek, a slight burning sensation or gum discomfort. Menstrual gingivitis typically occurs right before a woman's period and clears up once her period has started.

These conditions and symptoms tend to lessen as the amount of sex hormones decrease. It is important to maintain oral health during these hormonal fluctuations including at-home oral hygiene and regular professional dental care, so that the bone and tissues surrounding the teeth are not damaged.

-Seeking a Healthy Pregnancy

If you're pregnant, or planning to become pregnant, you need to know that your periodontal health can affect the pregnancy and ultimately the health of your baby. Studies have shown that any infection, including periodontal infection during pregnancy, may put you at risk for delivering a preterm, low birthweight baby. In fact, studies have shown that periodontal inflammation may play a role in developing preeclampsia, a potentially deadly condition that affects approximately 5% of U.S. pregnancies. The risk is too great for you to take a chance, so include periodontal health as part of your prenatal care.

If you are already pregnant and have been diagnosed with periodontal disease, a simple non-surgical procedure called scaling and root planning

may significantly reduce your chance of having a preterm, low birthweight baby. Talk to your periodontist about this procedure. A healthy mouth will give you, and your baby, something to smile about!

-Menopause

If you are menopausal or post menopausal, you may have noticed a change in the way your mouth looks or feels. You may, for example, experience discomfort in your mouth, including pain, burning sensations in the gum tissue, mouth sores or aphthous ulcers, and altered tastes. Saliva substitutes are available to lessen the effects of a “dry” mouth that some women experience.

Research studies have found that post-menopausal women may significantly reduce tooth loss by controlling their periodontal diseases. Researchers found that alveolar bone loss (the bone that holds the teeth in the mouth) is a strong predictor of tooth loss in post-menopausal women. The health of your teeth depends upon the strength of the alveolar bone holding them in the mouth. Periodontal diseases are the major cause of alveolar bone loss and tooth loss in people over the age of 35 years. Professional cleanings and diligent at-home oral hygiene are essential during this time of life. If you experience any symptoms associated with menopause or post-menopause, notify your dentist or periodontist immediately. He or she will tailor a treatment plan to help manage your condition.

The American Academy of Periodontology