

HEALTHY SMILES FOR MOM AND BABY

Insights into expecting
and new mothers'
oral health habits.



Together, all the way.®



About the study

Dental checkups are important throughout one’s life – possibly even more so during pregnancy. According to the American Academy of Periodontology (AAP), all infections are cause for concern among pregnant women because of the potential risk to the baby’s health as well. That’s why the AAP encourages women considering pregnancy to have a periodontal evaluation.¹

Because of hormonal changes that occur during pregnancy, the risk for periodontal disease can increase, and existing dental problems can worsen if left unchecked. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists states that for “general health and well-being, women should routinely be counseled about the maintenance of good oral health habits throughout their lives as well as the safety and importance of oral health care during pregnancy.”² The Cigna survey explored whether women understand the impact that their oral health can have on them and their baby during pregnancy. It also explored whether or not they are obtaining regular dental checkups.

The survey also explored how new mothers approached the oral health care of their children. Tooth decay is one of the most common chronic childhood diseases in the United States, but it is also preventable.³ Many small children have cavities even before they get to kindergarten. Approximately 23% of children between the ages of two and five have cavities in primary teeth.⁴

With greater insights into the oral health attitudes and behaviors of expecting and new mothers, stakeholders can better tailor communications and help influence positive action for improved oral health, benefiting both mother and child.

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Study methodology

Sample	National survey of 801 pregnant women and new mothers (within the past 12 months) between the ages of 21 and 45. Half have dental insurance.
Fielding dates	Interviews were completed from August 12, 2015 through August 16, 2015.
Length of survey	10 minutes
Method of distribution	Online
Survey Conducted by	M/A/R/C Research ⁵
Margin of error	+/- 3.5% at the 95% confidence level

	Pregnant women	New mothers
With dental insurance	200	201
Without dental insurance	200	200

Summary of findings

The importance of regularly visiting the dentist

Women report oral health declines during pregnancy, but many don't get dental checkups.

- 63% of women rate their oral health as very good or excellent pre-pregnancy, compared with 55% who say the same during pregnancy
- 76% of pregnant women have an oral health problem such as bleeding gums or toothaches
- 43% of pregnant women don't go for dental checkups

Takeaway: Explain the connection between oral health and overall wellness before, during and after pregnancy. For pregnant women, any infection, including tooth decay and gum disease, has the added possibility of affecting the baby's health.

Many pregnant women who avoid dental checkups are worried about the cost.

Takeaway: Clarify that many dental insurance plans cover in-network dental checkups every six months with little or no out-of-pocket costs. These services typically include an exam, teeth cleaning and certain x-rays. Some dental benefit plans even provide pregnant women with additional services like extra cleanings, periodontal procedures and cavity prevention procedures at no additional cost. The study revealed the potential influence that these programs can have on good oral hygiene habits.

Pregnant women without dental insurance are twice as likely to skip dental checkups as those with coverage.

Takeaway: Reinforce that the longer the wait between dental visits, the more likely a problem will develop. Often more complicated problems are more costly to treat, leading to the very situation that people want to avoid. Some individuals may also find it helpful to look into discount dental cards or local free or reduced-cost clinics.

The result of medical/dental integration at the physician's office

Medical professionals can be a key influence on improving oral health habits.

Women whose doctors talked about oral health during pregnancy are:

- Twice as likely to have a dental checkup while expecting
- Twice as likely to read materials about the importance of oral health.

New mothers are also more likely to clean their infant's gums daily if their pediatricians have spoken to them about oral health.

Oral health as overall wellness is often not discussed during medical visits.

- Only 44% of women surveyed say that their doctor talked to them about their oral health during their pregnancy visits
- Only 66% of new mothers say their pediatrician talks to them about their child's oral health

Takeaway: Bring oral health into the conversation about overall health during preventive checkups.

Advantages of maternity dental benefit programs

Maternity dental plan programs that provide extra benefits are likely to be as well received by women as healthy pregnancy medical insurance programs.

However, they are offered much less often.

Nearly 75% of women whose dental plan did not offer these additional benefits would have participated if a program was available.

Participating in a dental maternity benefit program can improve dental hygiene habits and self-assessments of oral health.

While 55% of women surveyed rated their oral health as very good or excellent during pregnancy that percentage jumps to 74% for women using dental maternity benefit programs.

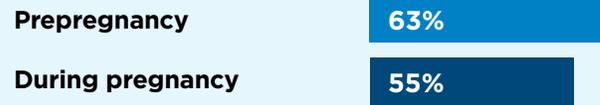
Takeaway: Help employers understand the value of offering special dental maternity benefit programs and how to effectively communicate them to their workforce to increase participation.

Oral health during pregnancy

Hormonal changes during pregnancy can worsen certain oral health conditions, such as gingivitis, and can cause more serious gum disease. In addition, if left unchecked, diet, daily dental hygiene routines and certain medications can also negatively impact a woman's oral health. For example, certain medicines can dry the mouth, causing increased growth of bacteria and damage to teeth and gums. Snacking on foods high in sugar and starches can increase plaque buildup on teeth. Plaque contains bacteria, which feeds on sugar and starches and attacks tooth enamel.

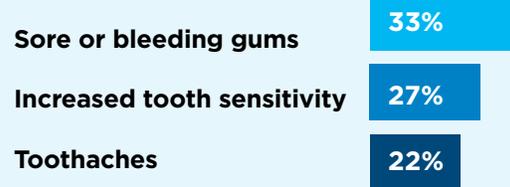


Women's self-rating of very good or excellent oral health



Oral health problems reported during pregnancy

76% of pregnant women suffered from at least one oral health problem, such as:



Dental checkups

Participation and coverage

43% of women don't go for dental checkups while pregnant. Women without dental insurance are twice as likely to skip dental checkups during pregnancy than those with coverage.

Frequency

36% of pregnant women say that it has been more than a year since their last dental checkup. 28% admit it has been at least two years.

Cost concerns

33% of women surveyed said they skipped dental checkups during pregnancy because they were concerned it would be too expensive. For women with insurance, it will be important to stress that many dental insurance plans cover in-network preventive care visits every six months with no or low out-of-pocket costs.

Routines impacting oral health

31% of pregnant women and 29% of new mothers are on maintenance medications for chronic conditions like asthma, diabetes and high blood pressure. The percentage of pregnant and new mothers reporting using maintenance medications is twice that for women ages 30–45 (42%) compared to those ages 21–29 (20%). Certain prescription medications can decrease saliva flow, and this “dry mouth” can increase the risk for tooth decay and gum disease.

43% of pregnant women and 51% of new mothers admit to snacking regularly on junk food. Plaque contains bacteria that feeds on sugar and starches and attacks tooth enamel, reinforcing the importance for women of maintaining regular dental checkups.

Medical doctors as key influencers for improving oral health

While 97% of women say they saw their doctor during pregnancy as frequently as they were directed, only 44% say that the importance of their oral health was mentioned during those visits. This is a missed opportunity. Oral health is directly connected to overall wellness, and any infection in the mother’s body, including tooth decay and gum disease, can affect the baby.

Communication and information can make a difference

- ▶ Women whose doctors talked with them about their oral health during pregnancy were about twice as likely to have a dental checkup while pregnant (77% vs. 41%) and also more than twice as likely to read materials about the importance of oral health than other pregnant women (87% vs. 42%).
- ▶ 55% of women surveyed rate their own oral health as very good or excellent during pregnancy, but that percentage climbs to 66% for women who said their doctor spoke with them about oral health during maternity visits.
- ▶ 53% of pregnant women and new mothers say they eat mostly healthy snacks, but that percentage climbs to 68% for women who said their doctor spoke with them about oral health during their maternity visits.

The effects of the doctor’s discussion seem to last beyond the delivery. While only 43% of new mothers in the survey said they have gone for a preventive dental checkup since giving birth, that number climbs to 63% for women whose doctors discussed their oral health during pregnancy. This is notable since the survey also found:

- ▶ 36% of new mothers report brushing and flossing less frequently since delivering. Why? 67% say they simply don’t have time to keep up on their hygiene. In addition, 42% of new mothers say it has been more than a year since they last had a preventive dental checkup.



Healthy pregnancy programs

The majority of pregnant women are equally interested in participating in medical healthy pregnancy programs and dental healthy pregnancy programs, but the dental programs aren't offered as frequently.

Healthy pregnancy insurance benefit programs

67% of pregnant women and new mothers with medical coverage say that their plan offers a healthy pregnancy program with additional resources. Only 45% of women with a dental plan say that their dental plan offers a similar program, such as coverage for extra teeth cleanings.

73% of women who have a medical pregnancy program available to them participate, as do 72% who have a dental maternity program available to them participate.

74% of women with dental coverage say they would participate if they had such a program available to them.

Impact of participation

The survey found a connection between participating in a dental maternity program and improved dental hygiene habits.

62% of pregnant women and new mothers say they brush their teeth at least twice a day. That percentage climbs to 76% for those who are participating or who have participated in a dental maternity program.

48% of women surveyed floss at least once a day. That percentage surges to 81% for women who are participating or who have participated in a dental maternity program.

Needs uncovered

43% of women who saw a dentist while expecting needed a prescription for a special fluoride rinse or toothpaste. Some maternity dental programs may fully cover the cost of these items. This finding points to the potential of a large unmet need for women who aren't getting a dental checkup during pregnancy and a potential cost-savings opportunity for women who could participate in a healthy pregnancy dental program.



It is also significant that while

55% of women surveyed rated their own oral health as very good or excellent during pregnancy that percentage jumps to

74% for women who are participating or who have participated in a dental maternity program.

Pediatricians as key influencers on baby's oral health

Similar to the influence a doctor can have on an expecting mother's oral health, the survey also found pediatricians can help parents get their babies on track for a lifetime of healthy smiles. However, some of these discussions are not taking place as part of the child's overall wellness.

The survey found that

82% of new mothers are very concerned about cavities in baby teeth, but

34% say their pediatrician has not spoken with them about how they can take care of their child's teeth and gums.



The survey indicates a connection between a pediatrician's discussions of oral health and improved dental hygiene habits.

Half of new mothers (50%) wipe their infant's gums at least once daily to clean them. That climbs to nearly two-thirds (65%) for women whose pediatricians discussed care with them.

Expecting and new mothers would benefit from tools and educational resources about children's oral health. 24% of those surveyed don't feel very confident that their children will enter kindergarten without cavities. Many mothers are justified in those concerns, as statistics reveal that nearly one-fourth of children age 2 to 5 will have a cavity in their permanent teeth.⁴

1. Gum Disease and Women. American Academy of Periodontology. Web page, www.perio.org/consumer/women.htm, accessed September 2015.
2. Committee Opinion Number 569: Oral Health Care During Pregnancy and Through the Lifespan. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. August 2013.
3. Division of Oral Health, National Center for Chronic Disease and Health Promotion. Web page, www.cdc.gov/OralHealth/children_adults/child.htm, updated November 10, 2014.
4. Dye BA, Thornton-Evans G, Li X, Iafolla TJ. Dental caries and sealant prevalence in children and adolescents in the United States, 2011–2012. NCHS data brief, no 191. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics. March 2015.
5. M/A/R/C Research is a full-service custom marketing research firm. It is part of the DAS Group of Companies, a division of Omnicom Group, Inc.



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