As a woman, you experience several physical changes, from childhood and puberty through your golden years. During these times, your body experiences hormonal changes, which can influence your oral health. By understanding these changes, you can practice good oral health habits that can keep your teeth and gums healthy at every stage of your life.

Puberty. Hormonal imbalances can make gums more sensitive to irritants such as food particles and plaque. Gums may swell, turn red and feel tender. Some girls may experience a temporary form of “menstruation gingivitis” (swollen or bleeding gums) in the days before the onset of each period. Certain medications, health conditions or even brushing too aggressively can put teens at greater risk for getting periodontal (gum) disease.

Oral contraceptives. Since oral contraceptives contain estrogen or progesterone, gingivitis may occur with long-term use. In fact, women who use birth control pills are twice as likely to develop dry socket (a complication of tooth extraction) and should consult their dentist before scheduling major dental procedures.

Pregnancy. Women with gum disease may have an increased risk for preterm, low birth weight deliveries. Changes in estrogen and progesterone levels due to pregnancy multiply a woman’s potential to develop gum disease. This phenomenon, known as “pregnancy gingivitis,” occurs frequently in pregnant women.

Menopause. Some women can experience dry mouth and changes in taste. They are also more likely to have decay around older fillings, as well as decay of the tooth root itself. Plaque builds up faster, and in greater amounts, as we age.

Seniors. Reduced dexterity and mobility may make daily oral hygiene habits more difficult. Medical or even mental conditions may present additional challenges to maintaining or receiving regular care.

Women vs. men

- Women say they take better care of their teeth than men.
- Women are more likely than men to brush their teeth after every meal (28.7% to 20.5%).
- Women are more likely than men to brush their teeth twice a day (56.8% to 49%).
- Women are more likely to have a dentist than men (89.2% to 74.6%).

More oral health issues that can affect women

- Women are more likely to be diagnosed with TMJ, myofacial pain, eating disorders (which erode the teeth) and Sjögren’s syndrome (which causes dry mouth).
- Smoking can stain teeth, and contribute to facial wrinkling and bad breath. Smoking also contributes to periodontal disease, which can lead to tooth loss. It has also been linked to serious systemic diseases.
- Diet pills and certain medications (over-the-counter and prescription) can decrease salivary flow, increasing a woman’s risk for cavities, gum disease and discomfort.

5. Journal of the American Dental Association, July 2001