



Dentist

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Is dental work during pregnancy unsafe?

It is a situation that occurs far too often: a woman discovers she is pregnant, and suddenly, every aspect of her routine life comes under scrutiny for potential risk. What can I eat? What skincare products are safe? Can I still enjoy my morning coffee? For many, this scrutiny even extends to dental care. Dental appointments are postponed, and nagging toothaches are endured. Although this caution is often based on misconceptions, it feels justified: better safe than sorry.

So, why do so many pregnant women skip dental visits? Somewhere along the way, they were told or assumed that dental care is not safe during pregnancy. They worry that X-rays could harm the baby or that anaesthesia is off-limits. Many believe it is better to wait until after the baby is born. However, this well-intentioned but misguided caution creates a dangerous gap in prenatal care.

In reality, avoiding the dentist can pose greater risks than the routine procedures performed in a dental office. Pregnancy brings significant hormonal changes that directly impact oral health, particularly the gums.

These hormones can enhance the body's reaction to plaque, leading to a condition known as "pregnancy gingivitis," characterised by swollen, bleeding, and tender gums. If left untreated, this can progress to more serious periodontal disease, which has been linked to adverse pregnancy outcomes.

Let us dispel these myths with facts. Dental cleanings are safe throughout pregnancy, and not only safe but especially important due to the hormonal changes affecting your gums. A professional cleaning is your primary defense against pregnancy gingivitis.

What about common concerns?

Dental X-rays are safe. According to the American College of Radiology, no single diagnostic X-ray delivers a radiation dose significant enough to cause harm to a developing embryo or foetus. In fact, the American Dental Association states that radiographs are considered safe for pregnant patients at any stage of pregnancy; abdominal or thyroid shielding is no longer recommended, although it can be offered if a patient prefers it for peace of mind.

Similarly, local anaesthesia (lidocaine, with or without epinephrine) is safe. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (ACOG) confirms that prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of oral conditions, including dental X-rays and local anaesthesia, are safe during pregnancy. This means that if you need a filling, you can receive treatment comfortably and pain-free.

Perhaps the most crucial point is this: necessary procedures, such as fillings, root canals, and extractions, can and should be performed during pregnancy if needed. Conditions requiring immediate treatment, such as extractions, root canals, and untreated cavities, can be managed safely at any time during pregnancy. Ignoring an infection or dental pain poses real threats to both the mother and the pregnancy, while treating these issues swiftly eliminates that risk.

The second trimester is often the most comfortable time for more extensive dental work, but routine care remains important throughout all trimesters. Do not let myths jeopardise your health and by extension, your baby's health.