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The Effects of Hormones

What do hormones have to do with a woman's oral health?

Hormonal changes occur throughout a woman's life, and with these hormonal changes come changes in oral health. Puberty, menstruation, pregnancy, and menopause all can have an effect on a woman's oral health. The use of oral contraceptives (birth control pills) can affect a woman's oral health as well.

When might I notice changes in my oral health?

During *puberty*, fluctuations in hormones can make gums more susceptible to gingivitis. As a result, the gums may appear red and swollen, and they can bleed.

During *menstruation*, women who have a tendency to develop canker sores and cold sores may develop a pattern in which these sores recur during every menstrual cycle.

During *pregnancy*, gingivitis may develop. In fact, gingivitis is the most common oral condition associated with being pregnant. Sometimes, however, women will avoid dental checkups for fear that treatment might harm the developing baby. In truth, untreated gum infections and decayed teeth can put a mother and her baby at risk. Dental infections may be responsible for as much as 5 percent of low-birth-weight pre-term babies. Pregnant women need routine checkups. Always tell your dentist and his or her staff if you are pregnant.



Some women also experience dry mouth while pregnant. Taking frequent sips of water and chewing sugarless gum or candy can help alleviate this symptom. Women who experience morning sickness need to brush their teeth more frequently than twice a day. This will help to prevent stomach acids from contacting the teeth and causing permanent damage to tooth enamel.

The use of *oral contraceptives* may cause gum tissue changes in some women. Women who use birth control pills may also be more prone to healing problems or dry socket after tooth extraction.

During *menopause*, women may experience oral changes that include pain, a burning sensation in the oral tissue, changes in taste, and dry mouth.

After menopause, there is an increased risk of developing osteoporosis,

which may increase the chance of tooth loss.

How can I maintain good oral health throughout my life?

Brush twice daily with toothpaste containing fluoride and floss once daily. Have your teeth professionally cleaned and examined by your dentist every six months (or more frequently if recommended by your dentist). Eat a well-balanced diet, and always tell your dentist and his/her staff about any medications, vitamins, and supplements that you are taking.

Ask your dentist any questions that you have about your oral health. Together, you and your dentist can create a treatment and prevention plan that specifically meets your needs. For more information about women's oral health, visit www.knowyourteeth.com.

Resources

www.knowyourteeth.com

Brought to you by the AGD, this Web site answers important dental health questions, offers the latest information on current treatments, provides tips for first-rate oral hygiene, and can help visitors find highly qualified general dentists near where they live.

1.877.2X.A.YEAR

AGD's toll-free referral number. Call to locate an AGD member dentist in your area.

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