

Women and Oral Health

Hormonal changes occur throughout a woman's life. During certain stages, she may have special oral health needs. Puberty, menstruation, pregnancy, menopause and oral contraceptives (birth control pills) can have an effect on a woman's mouth.



Puberty. During puberty, sex hormones (estrogen and progesterone) cause a female's body to mature. In addition to the visible body changes, the sex hormone increase can change the way the gums respond to germs (bacterial plaque) in the mouth. The gums can become more susceptible to infections (gingivitis) and may become very red and swollen, and they can bleed a lot.

Menstruation. The oral concerns associated with the onset of puberty are much the same during the menstrual cycle. Occasionally, women who are prone to canker sores and cold sores may develop a pattern where these sores recur during every menstrual cycle.

Pregnancy. Gingivitis is the most common oral condition associated with being pregnant. It occurs in close to 60 percent to 75 percent of all women who are pregnant. As during puberty and menstruation, the increase in hormones exaggerates the gum tissue's response to bacterial plaque. In addition to the overall gum changes, one area of the gum (usually between the teeth) may swell and produce what is called a "pregnancy tumor." Often times, this area is enlarged, dark red or bluish in color, and is difficult to keep clean. Generally, the tissue will decrease in size after the birth of the baby, but sometimes the tissue may need to be removed by a dentist. It is extremely important that an expectant mother have a healthy mouth and see a dentist early in her pregnancy. Women with periodontal (gum) disease are more likely to have premature or low birth weight babies.

Oral Contraceptives. Because the birth control pill mimics the effects of pregnancy, women may experience the gum tissue changes previously discussed. In addition to these changes, women on birth control pills may be more prone to healing problems after tooth extraction.

Menopause. Menopause, a normal event in a woman's life, also can bring about certain oral changes. The most common are pain, a burning sensation in the oral tissue, changes in taste and dry mouth.

Post Menopause. After menopause, there is an increased risk of developing osteoporosis (a condition of reduced bone mass and strength), which may increase the chance for tooth loss. Hormone replacement therapy may prevent this type of tooth loss.

Source:

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