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Magazine

March 2008 | S\$5.00/RM6.50

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## Heads Up?

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## A Kiasu Parents Guide

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# Q & A

## *Should I visit the dentist when pregnant?*

Absolutely! It is a popular myth that the dentist should be avoided during pregnancy when the truth is that pregnant women should maintain as good oral health as possible for reasons which will be outlined below.

Generally, pregnant women can safely receive the majority of dental treatments-including dental prophylaxis and fillings if required-during the second trimester when the developing foetus is less susceptible to local anaesthetics or antibiotics (though tetracycline should not be prescribed at any time during pregnancy.)

## *What is pregnancy gingivitis?*

This is a condition caused by increase in certain hormones-notably oestrogens and progesterones-during pregnancy characterised by swollen, red and tender gums, often accompanied by bleeding when the teeth are brushed. Studies suggest that about 50 per cent of pregnant women suffer from pregnancy gingivitis.

Another effect of gingivitis during pregnancy is the occasional development of pyogenic granulomas or 'pregnancy tumours' seen in up to 10 per cent of pregnancies; these are non-cancerous growths caused by an immune response to an irritant-in this case, dental plaque. They normally spontaneously resolve after pregnancy but may have to be surgically removed if they persist.

## *Why is oral hygiene so important during pregnancy?*

Recent evidence has shown that good oral hygiene during pregnancy could also be important to the developing foetus. Studies have established a link between the late stages of gum disease, periodontitis, and both premature birth and low birth weight. One study found that women with severe gum disease were up to seven times more likely to deliver prematurely than equivalent women with healthy gums whilst another demonstrated that a similar poor gum condition increased the likelihood of low birth weight babies by three times.

## *What about x-rays during pregnancy?*

The American Dental Association advises avoiding routine or elective dental radiographs during pregnancy but that, if absolutely required, a lead apron with additional collar to provide protection to the thyroid gland be used. The reality is, however, that the x-ray dose used for dental radiographs is extremely low and very safe.

## *Will I lose the calcium from my teeth during pregnancy?*

NO! This is a common dental myth. The calcium in dental enamel and dentine is bound and not available as a source of metabolic calcium. A small amount of calcium may be utilised from that stored in the bones but, in the absence of any underlying periodontal disease, the amount lost from the jaw bones is minimal and will not cause tooth loss.



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