

Your Dental Health

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It is well known that our dental health program in Interior Alaska has not yet reached everyone needing dental services. This is especially true about the people in the rural communities. However, everyone understands how important it is to take care of our teeth which is a part of our total well-being.

No. 22 — It Begins Before Birth

There is a lot you can do before your child is born to ensure healthier teeth for your son or daughter's lifetime.

Two important factors influence the soundness of your baby's teeth. First are the genes, the genetic instructions inherited from both parents. They will help determine the size, shape, texture and other qualities of the baby's teeth.

Second is the environment experience in the womb. This means proper nutrition, freedom from infections and protection from other variable factors, including drugs, that can affect the growth of teeth and jaws.

You cannot do anything about your child's genes, but you can take positive steps about the environment to increase the probability of sound teeth.

One of the important things to remember is that the things a pregnant woman eats determine the nutrition her unborn baby gets. It is most important for her own and her child's health that the pregnant woman follow her physician's advice concerning diet.

A well-balanced diet for the mother will mean adequate development of all the fetus tissues, including the cells that make up the gums, jaws and teeth.

Actually, an unborn infant's tooth buds begin forming about

the sixth week after pregnancy starts. The tooth buds grow layer, gradually building up the hard enamel outer surface and the soft dentin underneath the enamel.

The developing baby needs calcium, phosphorous and other minerals and vitamins for tooth development. These and other nutritive elements required by the baby must be supplied from the food the mother eats. Contrary to an old belief, the baby does not absorb calcium from the mother's teeth.

If a woman has more tooth decay during pregnancy, it may be because she is eating more sweets or neglecting to take proper care of her mouth. Bacteria always present in the mouth act of fermentable carbohydrates, especially sugar, to produce acids which attack the teeth; causing decay.

Poor mouth hygiene during pregnancy also may lead to gum infections. While the infection is caused by bacteria, it may be exaggerated by the pregnant woman's hormone imbalance.

Pregnant women should take special precautions to avoid all infections since they can affect the development of the fetus. German measles, for instance, may cause a marring of the enamel as well as other birth defects.

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(Next article: "Thumb or Pacifier for Baby")