Don’t Fight It Tooth and Nail: Your Dentist is on Your Side during Pregnancy!

By Beth Conover, APRN, CGC MotherToBaby Nebraska, UNMC

“There are so many risks to the baby if I go for dental work, right?” “What about x-rays?” “I don’t like going to the dentist anyway, so I’ll probably just wait until my baby is born. That should be fine, right?” Worries, excuses, we’ve heard it all at MotherToBaby when it comes to dental procedures during pregnancy. We often receive questions from women wondering whether dental care is safe. In short, the answer is….yes! What better time to talk about the reasons why it’s ok than during June – typically the month the American Dental Association dubs as “Oral Health Month.”

Routine dental care is low risk, and most emergency procedures can be done as well.
Good oral health improves your overall health, and increases your chances of a good pregnancy outcome. However, when you are scheduling a dental appointment and are pregnant (or trying to get pregnant), let the office know so that they can be prepared to make decisions about which procedures are safe for your baby. In some cases, you or your dentist may want to wait until after delivery for elective (non-necessary) procedures.

Here are some commonly asked questions we get from pregnant women:

- **When I brush my teeth, my gums have started to bleed. Is this normal? What should I do?**

Bleeding gums is a common problem during pregnancy. Pregnant women have hormonal changes that can increase their chances of getting gum problems such as gingivitis (puffy and tender red gums that bleed easily). Your dentist will want to monitor this so that it does not progress to a more serious gum disease. Periodontal disease is a bacterial infection of the gums and jaw bones that support the teeth, and can increase your chances of having a smaller baby, delivering early, and having other pregnancy complications. Dentists recommend that you floss daily, and get your teeth cleaned on a regular basis during pregnancy (consider having it done more frequently, if you are having pregnancy gingivitis).

- **It seems like pregnancy is causing me to get more cavities in my teeth…am I right?**

Pregnancy can contribute to women having more cavities. This is in part due to changes in diet such as frequent snacks including sugary foods. To prevent cavities, eat a healthy diet and brush your teeth after eating sweets. In addition, if you have morning sickness, the acid from your stomach can affect your tooth enamel and make cavities more likely. Rinse your mouth with water or mouthwash after morning sickness episodes. If your toothpaste is making your morning sickness worse, ask your dentist for the name of a bland-tasting toothpaste.

- **What if I need to get a cavity filled or a tooth pulled? Can I have a local anesthetic?**

Agents like lidocaine which are injected into your gums are low risk for your baby. In one study, researchers compared pregnant women who received lidocaine injections as part of dental treatment with women who did not, and found no significant increase in risk for miscarriage, prematurity, or birth defects. If you need a pain medication, your dentist will take into account where you are in your pregnancy so as to make a choice that is safest for your baby.

- **Are dental x-rays safe in pregnancy?**

You may choose to have routine X-rays done prior to pregnancy, or to delay them until after you deliver – talk to your dentist about the best options for you. However, if you have a dental emergency and need to have them done, don’t

hesitate. Advances in technology have made dental X-rays safer, and they do not involve as much radiation or may not involve radiation at all. Your dental office will cover your neck and abdomen with a lead apron, which lessens the exposure to your baby even more.

- **What else can I do to ensure dental health?**

Schedule a visit to your dentist before you are pregnant. Get teeth cleaned, gums examined, and any dental issues addressed prior to pregnancy.

Brush your teeth at least twice a day and floss once a day. This helps reduce plaque, the sticky film that covers your teeth and can make gums inflamed and increase your risk for periodontal disease.

I hope I've given you a few good tips to chew on – Your teeth and baby will thank you. Have a healthy pregnancy!

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About MotherToBaby
***MotherToBaby** is a service of the Organization of Teratology Information Specialists (OTIS), suggested resources by many agencies including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). If you have questions about exposures during pregnancy and breastfeeding, please call MotherToBaby toll-FREE at 866-626-6847 or try out MotherToBaby's **new text information service** by texting questions to (855) 999-3525. You can also visit **MotherToBaby.org** to browse a library of fact sheets about dozens of viruses, medications, vaccines, alcohol, diseases, or other exposures during pregnancy and breastfeeding or connect with all of our resources by downloading the new MotherToBaby free app, available on **Android** and **iOS** markets.*

Questions? Call 866.626.6847 | Text 855.999.3525 | Email or Chat at MotherToBaby.org.

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“I’m supposed to get dermal fillers tomorrow, is it still safe for me to get this procedure!?” Erin had booked this appointment with their dermatologist weeks ago, and while Erin was so excited today to learn that they were pregnant, they weren’t sure if the fillers were still a good idea. Hopeful for smoother skin and less noticeable wrinkles, they called us for guidance. Erin isn’t alone in having questions – MotherToBaby information specialists are often asked about getting cosmetic procedures during pregnancy or while breastfeeding.

Some cosmetic procedures require surgery; these are a type of plastic surgery. Examples include liposuction, breast augmentation, and rhinoplasty (nose). These types of cosmetic surgeries are best avoided while pregnant. But what about less invasive procedures? Let’s look at some commonly asked about treatments:

Botox

Botox is an injectable form of botulinum toxin. When used cosmetically, Botox is typically injected in the face or neck to help smooth out wrinkles or fine lines in the skin by temporarily paralyzing or relaxing the muscles. Botox is expected to stay in the area where it is administered and not enter the bloodstream. Because of this, it is unlikely to enter breast milk or to cross the placenta where it could reach a developing baby. However, it is important to note that Botox hasn’t been studied specifically for use during pregnancy or breastfeeding. There is also a risk for infection at the injection site, and the possibility that the toxin could spread beyond the area where it was administered. Read more about Botox here:
https://mothertobaby.org/baby-blog/botox-baby-what-we-know-about-the-risks-during-pregnancy-breastfeeding/

Semi-Permanent Makeup & Microblading

Semi-permanent makeup is achieved by tattooing areas of the face to highlight natural features and typically lasts for a few years before fading. This might include eye liner, lips, or eyebrows. Microblading is another form of tattooing used on the eyebrows. When it comes to the ink used in semi-permanent makeup, it isn’t clear how much of the pigment in the ink is able to enter the blood stream, cross the placenta, or how much is able to reach the baby. For folks who are breastfeeding, it also isn’t clear how much of the pigment might pass into breast milk. This makes it difficult to know if the pigment itself might cause a risk. We do know that with any tattoo, there is a possibility of

infection if the equipment is not sterilized properly. There can be a risk for Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C, HIV, and other infections like staph. There is also a possibility of infection during the healing process. If you do choose to get semi-permanent makeup while pregnant or breastfeeding, be sure to go somewhere that is practicing good hygiene. Also be sure to contact your healthcare provider if the tattooed area seems like it isn't healing correctly.

Teeth Whitening

Many people are also interested in brightening up their pearly whites. Some common teeth whitening products include whitening strips, whitening toothpastes, at home Blue (LED) Light Therapy, and professional whitening procedures administered by a dental hygienist or dentist. For the most part, these products are not expected to increase risks to a pregnancy or a breastfeeding baby. For more details about specific ingredients in teeth whitening products see: https://mothertobaby.org/baby-blog/whitening-teeth-during-pregnancy-or-breastfeeding-lets-bite-into-the-subject/

Chemical Peels

There are a few different types of cosmetic chemical peels that are used to address uneven skin tones, wrinkles, acne scarring, or sun damage by applying a product on the skin (topically) that then removes part of the upper layers of the skin. This usually involves a type of acid – it might be a combination of hyaluronic acid, glycolic acid, trichloroacetic acid, salicylic acid, or lactic acid and other ingredients. Light chemical peels involve the outer layer of skin (epidermis). Deep chemical peels can penetrate a bit further into the layers of your skin. Because the chemicals in each peel can vary, it can be a good idea to ask ahead of time for an ingredient list. A MotherToBaby specialist can talk with you about the active ingredients in the specific chemical peel you are considering. Read more about your skin & skin care here: https://mothertobaby.org/baby-blog/whats-the-skinny-on-skin-care

Lip Fillers & Dermal Fillers

Lip and dermal (or face) fillers are injected substances that are used to fill in lines and wrinkles or add volume to areas in the face or lips. There are currently four types of fillers that are approved by the Federal Drug Administration (FDA). Hyaluronic acid fillers are the most common. Hyaluronic acid, along with Calcium hydroxylapatite and Polylactic acid fillers are considered temporary – these will eventually be broken down and absorbed by the body. Polymethylmethacrylate is not absorbed by the body – this filler is made up of small round plastic beads suspended in collagen. So what do we know about the use of fillers during pregnancy or breastfeeding? The answer is not much. There is limited research on these substances when administered during pregnancy or while breastfeeding, so it may be best to pause any injections until a later date. There is also a potential risk for infection at the injection site. The FDA advises anyone interested in fillers to get them from a licensed healthcare provider and to discuss the risks and benefits with them before the procedure.

So, what did Erin do about their appointment for dermal fillers?

When it comes to cosmetic procedures while pregnant or breastfeeding, it is important to consider what is known about a procedure and weigh any potential risks. In Erin's case, they decided it would be best to wait to reschedule their next dermal filler appointment until after their child was born. They ended our call by telling me, "I think it will

give me more peace of mind to cancel my appointment and wait until after my pregnancy now that I know there isn't much research. I'll talk to my dermatologist about other skin care options in the meantime."

Do you have a question about a cosmetic procedure during pregnancy or breastfeeding?

Speak with a MotherToBaby specialist via phone, text, chat, or email.

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