

marie claire

health

say cheese dental hygiene

Hormones not only cause mood swings; they can also play havoc with your gums and teeth. The only precaution is to ensure complete oral health.

By Dr Ajay Sharma

How do fluctuating hormone levels contribute to dental problems in women?

During puberty, an increased level of sex hormones cause increased blood circulation to the gums. This may result in an increase in the gum's sensitivity and greater reaction to any irritation, including food particles and plaque. During this time, the gums may become swollen, red and tender. Menstruation too can lead to dental problems like gingivitis. Women with this condition may experience bright red, swollen and bleeding gums and sores on the inside of the cheek. Menstruation gingivitis typically occurs right before a woman's period and clears up once she begins to bleed. Women may experience gingivitis during their pregnancy too. In some cases, gums swollen by pregnancy gingivitis can react strongly to irritants and form large lumps called pregnancy tumours. Also, women who use oral contraceptives may be susceptible to the same oral health conditions. Women who are menopausal or post-menopausal may experience discomfort in the mouth, including dry mouth, pain and burning sensations in the gum tissue and altered taste. Gums get dry or shiny, bleed easily and the colour of the gum varies from abnormally pale to deep red. Most women find oestrogen supplements helpful in relieving these symptoms.

How can one protect her teeth?

As one progresses from puberty, the tendency of the gums to swell in response to irritants will lessen. However, during puberty, it is important to follow a good at-home oral hygiene regimen, which includes brushing, flossing, and regular dental care. In some cases, a dental professional may recommend periodontal therapy that removes plaque and calculus by controlling the harmful bacteria.

RESEARCH

Hormones or the remarkable changes they undergo when a woman makes the transition from puberty to menopause make her teeth and gums easily prone to dental problems. Research has shown that at least 23 per cent of women in the age group of 30 to 54 years have periodontitis, which is a

chronic bacterial infection that affects the gums and bone supporting the teeth. And 44 per cent of women between the age of 55 and 90 years who still have their teeth have periodontitis.

Since the disease is often a 'silent' one, many women do not realise they have it until it reaches an advanced state.

What can one do to maintain oral hygiene?

Periodontal monitoring and oral hygiene is important for women, especially if they notice changes in their mouths during hormonal fluctuation. Brush properly every day. Also, visit a dental professional for cleaning at least twice a year. Keep him or her informed about any changes in your health history. ■

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