Women's Oral Health Issues

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Introductory Remarks

Comprehensive guidelines for preventive services for women must include:

- oral health information
- screenings for oral disease
- preventive dental services, with a focus on pregnancy and the early postpartum period

Oral health is key to overall health

Historical Perspective:

- 1891 - Willoughby D. Miller proposed “The human Mouth as a Focus of Infection”

- 1900 - William Hunter published on the role of oral sepsis as a cause of disease

- 1919 - Edward C. Rosenow published case reports supporting the concept of oral focal infection as a key factor in systemic disease
Current theory: Oral-systemic disease connection

There *may be* relationships between oral disease and systemic illnesses such as:

- Cardiovascular disease
- Increased risk of stroke
- Respiratory illness
- Diabetes

Women have special oral health needs

Hormonal fluctuations

- Puberty
- Menses
- Pregnancy
- Menopause
- Post-menopausal
- Use of contraceptive medications
Puberty/Adolescence/Onset Menses

Oral Conditions
- Increased prevalence of gingivitis
- Overgrowth of the gingiva
- Recurrent herpes
- Aphthous ulcers

Dental Management
- Local preventive care
  - Scaling
  - Improved oral hygiene
  - Frequent recalls as needed
- Antiviral medication
- Palliative treatment

Pregnancy

Oral Conditions
- Dental caries – attributed to local cariogenic and sociobehavioral factors
- Acid erosion of teeth (rare)
- Gingival Inflammation: 60% - 75%
- Pregnancy tumors
- Tooth mobility
- Xerostomia

Maternal Oral Health is Related to a Child’s Oral Health
Pregnancy

Dental Management
- Local preventive care
  - Scaling
  - Improved oral hygiene
  - Frequent recalls as needed
- Nutrition counseling
- Dental treatment as needed: elective vs. emergency

Potentially at Risk:
- Bacteria known to cause oral diseases can be passed from mother to child.

A Teaching Moment Opportunity:
- Expectant mothers can be educated on the importance of infant oral health that can promote health for the next generation.

Menopause/Post-menopausal

Oral Conditions
- Oral mucosal changes and possible discomfort (pain, burning sensations, altered taste)
- Xerostomia
- Periodontal disease and tooth loss

Dental Management
- Preventive services
Diseases and disorders more common in women impacting oral health

- **Eating Disorders** (dental erosion, rampant decay, poor oral hygiene, parotid gland enlargement, and tissue trauma)
- **Sjögren's Syndrome** (and xerostomia with rampant decay and oral microbial infections)
- **Intimate Partner Violence** (and facial or dental trauma)
- **TMD Disorders** (and chewing dysfunction / chronic mastication pain)
- **Osteoporosis** (and periodontal bone loss)
- **Breast Cancer** (and intravenous bisphosphonate or other bone-modifying agents osteonecrosis of the jaw)
- **Burning Mouth Syndrome** (and chronic oral mucosal pain and burning)

U.S. Preventive Services Task Force

Only 3 USPSTF recommendations on oral health issues:

1. **Counseling for Dental and Periodontal Disease** (inactive)
2. **Prevention of Dental Caries in Preschool Children**
3. **Screening for Oral Cancer**

None specific to women's oral health
U.S. Preventive Services Task Force A & B Recommendations

A and B grade recommendations that cross-over into oral health promotion and disease prevention:
- Healthy diet counseling
- Dental caries chemoprevention: preschool children
- Osteoporosis screening
- Tobacco use counseling
- Sexually transmitted infections counseling

Bright Futures Theme 7: Promoting Oral Health

- Supplemental fluoride
- Children and youth with special health care needs
- Oral hygiene and feeding practices that promote oral health
- Oral health risk assessment
- Periodontal conditions
- Traumatic injury to the mouth
- Orthodontia
Other Guidelines Addressing Scope of Preventive Oral Health Services for Women

- Oral Health During Pregnancy and Early Childhood- Practice Guidelines (NY State Dept. of Health; California Dental Association Foundation)

- Adolescent Oral Health Care Guideline (American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry)

- Guideline on Perinatal Oral Health Care (American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry)

- Summary of recommendations for clinical preventive services (American Academy of Family Physicians; for fluoride)

- Prevention of secondary disease: preventive medicine. Oral health care (NY State Dept. of Health)

- Oral Health Care (Office of the Medical Director NY State Dept. of Health AIDS Institute)

What are the gaps for recommendations?

1. National perinatal oral health guidelines

2. Oral health promotion and disease prevention guidelines for patients with eating disorders

Recommendations

1. Dentist appointed to the USPSTF
2. National maternal perinatal oral health assessment guidelines
3. Federally mandated Medicaid dental coverage for pregnant women
4. Coordination of federal resources specific to women's health and oral health
5. Metrics to establish oral health baseline and demonstrate improvement in impacting women's health

Summary

We need to improve oral health awareness and access to preventive oral health care among women of all ages.

"Oral health is integral to general health. You cannot be healthy without oral health."