

# You

TEND TO  
YOURSELF, BODY  
AND SOUL

HEAT-PROOF BEAUTY.....  
MAKING SENSE OF STOMACH WOES  
.....TEAMWORK TIPS

## The Truth About Mom Teeth

If you tend to bathe your teeth in staining beverages (hello, cold brew), use those same chompers to tear open impenetrable toy packaging, and skip flossing because #notime, we've got you. Here are the tips, tricks, and products you need to take better care of your whole mouth. →

by **LESLIE GOLDMAN**  
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**GROWING UP** with a dentist for a mother, Ruchi Sahota, D.D.S., was a devoted brusher and flosser. She attended dental school and later opened a practice with her mom in Fremont, California. Then she had a baby—and developed her first cavity in 15 years. “When I had my daughter, I didn’t know what day it was, let alone if I’d brushed or not,” says Dr. Sahota, a spokesperson for the American Dental Association. “Whether we’re in the midst of newborn madness or homeschool chaos, we’re so concerned about our kids that we don’t focus on ourselves, and that includes our teeth.”

The result: Moms’ oral health care doesn’t just take a backseat; it gets shoved in the trunk under the jumper cables, stroller, and diaper bag. Not a good look for a group that moonlights as actual Tooth Fairies. Fortunately, it’s never too late to stop committing enamel cruelty. Here, experts help us tackle the top obstacles to healthy teeth.

**THE PROBLEM:**

**You forget to brush after the baby comes.**

In the frenzied haze of those first postpartum months, finding time to brush your teeth becomes a luxury. “But when you wake up and swab your tongue across your teeth and feel fuzziness, that’s plaque—invisible bacteria that release acid onto the teeth,” Dr. Sahota says. “The goal of brushing is to disrupt that plaque so it doesn’t settle in and cause trouble.” Matters worsen when you eat and drink sugar-containing foods, whether that’s fruit, ice cream, or some sparkling waters (which can also be as acidic as orange juice). “Sugars mix with oral bacteria to create more acid, and the sticky plaque holds the acid against your teeth.” These are the “sugar bugs” you may have heard your child’s dentist warn about.

**THE FIX:** Forgetting to brush once is NBD. But when you skip sessions, slimy plaque sets the stage for cavities and decay, then hardens into tartar that creeps under the gumline, potentially causing gum disease and, eventually, bone and tooth loss.

Dr. Sahota encourages new moms to stash a toothbrush in every bathroom and let them serve as visual reminders to



**WHITER, STRAIGHTER,  
HEALTHIER  
TEETH ARE POSSIBLE  
TO ACHIEVE AT  
HOME, EVEN WITH THE  
NONSTOP PACE  
OF MOTHERHOOD.**

brush twice every day for two minutes using fluoride toothpaste like Colgate Zero Toothpaste (\$5; drugstores). Don’t forget daily flossing and swishing; it unguns between-teeth plaque and helps keep gums tip-top. Try Listerine Naturals Gum Restore Mouthwash (\$5; target.com), which is free of dyes and artificial sweeteners.

**THE PROBLEM:**

**The standard mom diet is staining your teeth.**

Sipping on lattes, matcha, and soda (even diet) throughout the day is the main culprit, says Lauren Becker, D.D.S., a dentist in New York City and mom of two. “Anything that stains a white shirt will stain your teeth.” Red wine, clearly, is another hard-core stain maker.

**THE FIX:** Don’t break up with your beloved drinks. There are effective whitening options that suit a range of budget and patience levels. Over-the-

counter bleaching strips typically cost \$40 to \$70 and are worn for a time daily for several weeks in a row. If you’re able to go to the dentist, you can get custom trays that you fill with a bleaching agent and wear on a few consecutive nights. These range from \$250 to \$500 and yield similar results to strips, albeit a bit faster. When restrictions lift in your area, you could consider an in-office whitening laser procedure like ZOOM!, which costs \$500 on average. Dr. Becker says to steer clear of trendy charcoal-containing whiteners and toothpastes. They’re so abrasive that they can actually erode the enamel, allowing the softer yellow tissue below the surface to show—precisely the look you’re trying to ditch.

**THE PROBLEM:**

**You think you’re Mama Shark.**

What do LEGOs, string-cheese wrappers, and the tag on your kid’s new pj’s have in common? You use your teeth to tear them apart. Dr. Becker says many a parent has chipped a tooth attempting such feats.

**THE FIX:** Your dentist can put Humpty back together again. She can use a tooth-colored composite material to reshape or bond the chipped tooth, making it look whole once more. (Bonding typically costs \$400 to \$700 per tooth and lasts about five years.) A crown or veneer, usually made from porcelain for the front teeth, is a more permanent option (and about \$2,000 per tooth).

**THE PROBLEM:**

**Dental anxiety is real.**

A survey by the American Dental Association found that 22 percent of American adults are afraid of the dentist.

**THE FIX:** Today’s dentists have all sorts of tricks up their lab coats for scaredy-cat patients. There are topical anesthetic gels that can be applied before cleanings, and for fillings, there’s nitrous oxide, which turns an hour-long procedure into “me time” and quickly wears off. In Dr. Becker’s office, patients can zen out with CBD oil, headphones, and touch screens attached to every chair. “Technology offers comfort and a distraction,” she says. “A chance to lie down and watch a show? Sign me up!”

**THE PROBLEM:**  
**Shift happens.**

Credit for that cute play on words goes to Chicago orthodontist and father of three Dale Benjamin, D.M.D. It describes the phenomenon of your teeth playing musical chairs in your 30s and 40s. “The lower jaw undergoes a growth spurt in your 20s and 30s that causes the bottom teeth to shift and jumble up over the years,” he explains. Decades of talking and chewing, plus habits like grinding and clenching, hasten the shifting.

**THE FIX:** Depending on the state of your smile and whether you care if your smile is bedazzled, an orthodontist can offer removable plastic straightening trays like Invisalign (\$1,000 to \$5,000), behind-the-teeth braces (\$3,000 to \$13,000), or clear or metal braces (\$1,000 to \$5,000). You could also opt for a permanent behind-the-teeth retainer, which won’t straighten things out but stops further shifting (\$200 to \$500). Your insurance may cover orthodontia, or you may be able to use FSA dollars. Afterward, you’ll look younger: “As teeth crowd, they lean back slightly. When realigned, they move forward a bit, which can help fill out wrinkles and make lips look fuller,” Dr. Benjamin says.

**THE PROBLEM:**  
**Our mouths are a hot mess during pregnancy.**

Hormonal changes and a boost in blood volume leave gums swollen and prone to bleeding (aka gingivitis). Morning sickness and acid reflux erode enamel. And unless you brush and floss after every craving-fueled snack, your cavity risk soars. Nearly half of all expectant moms skip their dental visits, says a Cigna survey. This may occur because “women weren’t sure if seeing the dentist was safe for the baby,” Dr. Sahota says.

**THE FIX:** Consult your ob-gyn before visiting, but if your dentist’s office has reopened, it’s generally safe to go, Dr. Sahota says. Cleanings, X-rays, and local anesthesia are all safe for your unborn child, according to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. “Your dentist may even want you to come in more often to help get problems like gingivitis or tooth decay under control,” Dr. Sahota says.

Untreated gingivitis can progress to gum disease, which is linked with preterm birth and low birth weight.

**THE PROBLEM:**  
**Oral bacteria are contagious.**

If you don’t take care of your teeth for yourself, do it for your kids. “When you suck on your child’s pacifier to clean it off or you share utensils, bacteria from your mouth make their way into your child’s mouth,” Dr. Benjamin says. Those bacteria alone won’t cause

cavities, but when they’re exposed to sugar in your little one’s mouth, they create acid that certainly can.

**THE FIX:** Research shows that moms with solid oral-care skills are more likely to raise all-star brushers. “Your kids look to see what you do,” says Colleen Crowley, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist in Santa Barbara, California, mom of three, and cocreator of a puppet toothbrush for little ones. Tell them about your own fun checkups, let them press the button on your Waterpik, and brush together. Dinosaur flosser optional. ✕

**Brush Up on Basics**

**TOOTHPASTE TO GO**

Toss **Hello Toothpaste Tablets** (\$9; target.com) into your purse or desk drawer and you’ll always have toothpaste on hand for funky mask breath. The tablets are individually dosed—just chew until they turn into a paste, then brush normally.

**POCKET-FRIENDLY REFRESH**

This bleach-free **Moon Whitening Pen** (\$20; ulta.com) delivers a breath reset plus brightening. Paint the gel over teeth for a burst of sweet mint flavor after meals or before bed.

**HIGH-TECH HYGIENE**

To ensure you’re getting top-notch cleaning (especially in the wake of canceled dental appointments), invest in the **Philips Sonicare ProtectiveClean Sonic Electric Toothbrush** (\$110; usa.philips.com). The brush uses smart technology to give you cues on your pressure as well as reminders to buy new brush heads.

**UPGRADE THE WHITENING EXPERIENCE**

The latest iteration of at-home whitening products, such as **Crest 3D Whitestrips Arctic Mint** (\$45; drugstores), are infused with flavor, so they taste good as they sit on your teeth. Dispense two dots of flavor serum to the strips before applying them to your teeth, then leave them on for 30 minutes.

