Prenatal Oral Health Conversation Guide

The following is designed to help you talk to your patients about their oral health. Please refer to the answers from the Prenatal Oral Health Information Form to decide which category (**A**, **B**, or **C**) best fits the patient.

These patients are already taking good care of their oral health and likely have the means to get dental care and buy oral care products. Your role is to reinforce their good habits and help them with any changes they may experience during pregnancy.

Here are some talking points to help you get the conversation started:

- **I'm really glad to see that you are able to get needed dental care and to take care of your teeth. It's even more important during pregnancy when you might be more likely to have some dental problems.**

- **Can you tell me about the last time you went to a dental professional?**
  [Some patients may reveal that they haven't seen a dental professional in a long time, don't have one, or didn't think they should when pregnant. In this case, reassure them that dental care is safe and important during pregnancy and offer assistance to find a dentist that will see pregnant women. Listen to a patient if they tell you about a negative experience in the past or have fear and anxiety about getting dental care. Be empathetic and offer to help them find a dental professional they can trust.]

- **Can you tell me about any changes or pain you have noticed in your teeth and gums while you've been pregnant?**
  [Pregnant women are more prone to getting cavities and gum disease. To prevent this from happening, support your patient in eating healthy, getting regular dental care, and brushing twice a day. Flossing once a day also helps with reducing gum inflammation. If she has urgent needs like pain in a tooth or gums, talk about safe pain relief and refer to a dental professional for follow-up.]

- **What do you do after you have morning sickness?**
  [Some of your patients may not experience morning sickness, but if they do, remind them to rinse their mouth with a mixture of a cup of water and 1 tsp of baking soda. They can mix up a larger batch (estimate about 1 tsp baking soda per cup of water) to be used over 3 or 4 days, if needed.]

- **Do you have any questions about how best to take care of your teeth and gums while pregnant?**
  [Do your best to answer any questions your patient may have. For those you can't answer, refer to a dental professional.]

- ***Key Points:*** Keep taking good care of your teeth at home, rinse with baking soda mixture after vomiting to protect tooth enamel, and see a dental professional regularly for check ups. By doing these things, you can give your baby the best start for a lifetime of good oral health.

If you find your patient could use help to address access to care, you can refer them to these resources:

Call 2-1-1. This is a free and confidential service that helps people across the U.S. find local resources and assistance they need, whether it be health care services, housing, food, personal crises and more. This resource is available 24/7 to speak with a live, highly-trained service professional in the patient's area.

Visit Benefits.gov. This is an online resource that can help a patient find federal benefits they may be eligible for in the U.S. Benefit categories include health care and medical assistance, financial assistance, food and nutrition, child services, housing and more.

Write in local resources available to your patients here.

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Most of your patients are likely in this category. They have a good understanding of oral health but don't always put it into practice. Your role is to reinforce the good behaviors they have in place and help them set goals for things that they may need to work on. Helping them make these changes now can improve their health while pregnant and set their baby up for a lifetime of good oral health.

Here are some talking points to help you get the conversation started:

- **You're already doing a lot to make sure your baby is healthy! I remind all my patients that's it is also important and safe to visit a dental professional regularly during pregnancy to check for any signs of gum disease or tooth decay, which can be shared with your baby if they're not addressed.**

- **Can you tell me about the last time you went to a dental professional?**
  [Some patients may reveal that they haven't seen a dental professional in a long time, don't have one to go to, or didn't think they should when pregnant. In this case, reassure them that dental care is safe and important during pregnancy and offer assistance to find a dentist that will see pregnant women. Listen to a patient if they tell you about a negative experience in the past or have fear and anxiety about getting dental care. Be empathetic and offer to help them find a dental professional they can trust.]

- **Can you tell me about any changes or pain you have noticed in your teeth and gums while you've been pregnant?**
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- **Do you have any questions about how best to take care of your teeth and gums while pregnant?**
  [Do your best to answer any questions your patient may have. For those you can't answer, refer to a dental professional.]

- **Do you have any ideas on things you could work on to improve your oral health?**
  - ***Encourage your patient to choose one or two goals to work on between appointments and don't forget to check in next time. Some answers might include the following:***
    - ***Drink more water and less sugar-sweetened beverages.***
    - ***Choose healthy foods to satisfy pregnancy cravings instead of junk food.***
    - ***Brush twice a day for two minutes.***
    - ***Floss once a day.***
    - ***Make an appointment to get a dental check-up... and go!***
    - ***Rinse mouth with a cup of water and 1 tsp baking soda after morning sickness.***
    - ***Quit smoking.***

- ***Key Points:*** Keep taking good care of your teeth at home, rinse with baking soda mixture after vomiting to protect tooth enamel, and see a dental professional regularly for check ups. By doing these things, you can give your baby the best start for a lifetime of good oral health.

See back for resources

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These patients may not have the keys to open the door to good oral health. Good oral hygiene practices may not have been something they learned or understand. They may have trouble finding a dental professional to see, fear going to one, or can't afford care. As you start a conversation with them about their oral health, keep in mind that they may have livelihood considerations, fear and anxiety, or significant societal barriers that make addressing dental care difficult. Your role is to assist them in getting urgently needed care to protect their health and that of their baby and to support them in setting goals to improve oral health behaviors at home.

Here are some talking points to help you get the conversation started:

- **There are a lot of things to keep track of when you are pregnant, and it can be hard for everyone. Something I emphasize with all my patients is the importance of oral health. That's because when you're pregnant, you may be more prone to gum disease and cavities. Taking good care of your mouth has the power to protect your baby from harmful germs and provide them with good oral health for life.**

- **Can you tell me about the last time you went to a dental professional?**
  [Some patients may reveal that they haven't seen a dental professional in a long time, don't have one to go to, or didn't think they should when pregnant. In this case, reassure them that dental care is safe and important during pregnancy and offer assistance to find a dentist that will see pregnant women. Listen to a patient if they tell you about a negative experience in the past or have fear and anxiety about getting dental care. Be empathetic and offer to help them find a dental professional they can trust.]

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See back for more

Any urgent needs should be addressed as soon as possible by a dental professional. Consider providing a warm hand-off and be sure to discuss any medications or other illicit drugs that your patient may be using to address dental pain.

If you have many patients in this category in your practice consider providing or prescribing oral care products (toothbrush, toothpaste, floss, mouthwash) that they may not be able to afford otherwise. A way to do this might be to partner with local dental professionals, companies, or dental societies to obtain donations.

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