

Review Article

Role of Dentist in Menstruation: Question to Care for Females

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A B S T R A C T

Menstruation & menstrual practices are still bounded by socio cultural restriction & taboos resulting in adolescent girls remain ignorant of scientific facts & hygienic practices during menstruation. Menstruation brings with it a bundle of problems like period pains, nausea, heavy bleeding and behavioral changes. Menstrual cycle may influence the health of females' teeth, gums and oral cavity due to certain hormonal imbalances. For maintaining the good oral hygiene dentist can play important role in guiding and helping females on menstruation for various dental treatment.

Keywords: Dentist, Female, Gingivitis, Mensuration, Oral Hygiene

Introduction

Menstruation is a phenomenon which is distinctive to the females. The onset of menstruation is a very important change occurring among the girl's life during the adolescent years. The first menstruation known as menarche occurs between 11 and 15 years with a mean of 13 years. Adolescent girls combine a vulnerable group, particularly in India where female child is neglected one. Menstruation is still regarded as something unclean or dirty in Indian society. The reaction to menstruation depends upon awareness and knowledge about the subject. The manner in which a girl learns about menstruation and its associated changes may have an impact on her response to the event of menarche. Although menstruation is a natural process, and it is linked with several misconceptions and practices,

which sometimes result into adverse health outcomes.¹ In many low-income and middle-income communities, access to sanitary products like pads, tampons, or cups is limited, and girls often resort to using other materials such as mud, leaves, or animal skins to try to absorb the menstrual flow. Appropriate and hygienic infrastructure including waste disposal mechanisms, soap and water for washing, and safe, private, and accessible toilets is rarely available to females in lower class communities.² Menstruation can have substantial impacts on the ability of girls and women to participate in education, work and social activities, which is likely to have long-term impacts on education, health, economic and gender equality outcomes.³ As menstruation is always considered as taboo in society for females and misconceptions during menstruation may led to many serious health problems including poor personal hygiene,

bleeding gums, bad breath and unsafe sanitary conditions result in the girls facing gynecological problems.^{4,5}

Effect of Menstruation on Oral Cavity

According to United Nations Children does Emergency Fund (UNICEF), there are 243 million adolescents comprise 20% of the total population of India which clearly shows that India is truly “young”.⁶ Menstrual cycle may influence the health of your teeth, gums and oral cavity due to various female reproductive hormonal changes especially estrogen and progesterone.⁷ Menstruation gingivitis is a common oral problem that women go through due to the hormonal fluctuations during the course of menstruation or days before you get your period. Gingival tissues or gum tissues have lots of estrogenic receptors, it's response to the hormonal changes is rapid which may result in various dental problems like red, soft and swollen and tender gingiva leading to advanced conditions like bad breath, bleeding gums, bleeding while brushing, gingival pain and discomfort while chewing hard foods and mobility of tooth.⁸

The bacteria which is already present in the mouth multiplies rapidly due to hormonal surges and paves the way for gum diseases and erosion of gingiva and pockets formation may also present which may turn into periodontitis.⁸

If menstruating female is on oral contraceptives, which contain progesterone, there may be the increased levels of the hormone in body which trigger the gingivitis often seen in pregnant women and known as “pregnancy gingivitis”, it is marked by swelling and redness, caused by increased blood flow to the gums.^{9,10} Redness of tongue and buccal mucosa with burning sensation also occurs in some females while pre-period and during menstruating cycle.⁹ Some females may have excessive flow of saliva while on the other hand dryness of mouth may also be present.⁹

Herpes outbreaks are also more likely to occur during and prior to menstruation, the American Dental Association reports. The increase in the hormone progesterone before and during period cycle of female may also herpes infection to gum and oral mucosa.⁹ According to the Connective Tissue Disorder literature available, the relation between gum sensitivity and menstruation is, in rare cases, associated with a more serious bleeding disorder, Von Willebrand disease which is a genetic bleeding disorder that may be characterized by heavy menstrual bleeding, excessive bleeding after dental surgery and bleeding during tooth brushing.⁷

Role of Dentist

Oral cavity is the reflector of human body and its diseases. Dentist can play a vital role in treatment of female on menstruation. Dentist can help menstruating female by careful examination of oral cavity as well as the symptoms described by the female. Dentist can advise change in

dietary habits and allow for foods low in carbohydrates and sugar as sugar can irritate inflammation of gums.¹¹ Dentist can help to maintain a proper routine oral care to avoid various dental problems and advice few guidelines that will help in dealing with the problem:⁸

- Brushing daily: Regularly brushing of teeth using a soft nylon-bristle toothbrush, at least twice daily in a circular motion or a straight downward motion is the best way to clean the teeth. In addition, a back-and-forth scrub may be needed to focus on the gum line.
- Tongue cleaning: This is a mandatory step which helps to collect and clean the bacteria that sticks to our tongue.
- Floss your teeth: Floss teeth every time, after finish with brushing the teeth which helps to reduce plaque built-up between teeth.
- Use a mouthwash: Rinsing oral cavity with mouthwash, it helps in curing gum inflammation as anti-bacterial mouthwashes contain the ingredient chlorhexidine which helps to kill dental bacteria's and cavities.
- Use an interdental brush: Further techniques like Oral prophylaxis (ultrasonic scaling) or use of interdental brush, a plaque removal device or an irrigation device can help.

Dentist can do professional scaling which is also extremely vital because once the plaque has hardened and built-up or become tartar, only a dentist or dental hygienist can eradicate it. Advanced technologies like gingivectomy, flap surgery, root planning is of greater help in the chronic conditions among menstruating females.^{8,9}

Conclusion

Healthy practices are important for health and well-being of humans. Menstrual period is one such time when females are expected to adopt hygienic practices such as bathing and washing of genital tract, changing of pads at night and school hours which is now a day's followed by higher percentage of girls. Further, girls are becoming more alert about the importance of adopting healthy practices during menstrual period. Society education programs such as government initiatives, mass media campaigns, and education awareness workshops which can influence boys, men, older women, and health workers to lessen the effect of the menstruation taboo from our society and also helps female's ability to manage menstruation effectively and with dignity.

Conflict of Interest: None

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