

What Your Gums Can Expect When You Are Expecting

Congratulations! You are pregnant or planning on becoming pregnant! Whether or not you want it, everyone you know will be giving you advice about how to eat, sleep, exercise, and take care of your body during this exciting time. However, what some might forget to add to that list is the importance of taking care of your oral health.

Good oral health is always important. However, it may be especially important for expecting mothers as recent research suggests that pregnant women with periodontal diseases may be up to seven times more likely to have a baby that's born too early and too small. Preterm births are dangerous for both baby and mother. They are the leading cause of neonatal death and can lead to life-long health problems such as cerebral palsy, mental retardation, and difficulties with blindness and lung disease.¹

The likely culprit of this possible connection is a labor-inducing chemical found in oral bacteria called prostaglandin. Very high levels of prostaglandin are found in women with severe cases of periodontal disease.²

In addition, other research has identified bacteria commonly found in the mouth and associated with periodontal diseases in the amniotic fluid of some pregnant

women. Amniotic fluid is a liquid that surrounds an unborn baby during pregnancy. Any disruptions in the amniotic fluid, such as a bacterial infection, could potentially be dangerous to both the mother and baby.³

Don't panic! Take your concerns to your dental professional. If you're diagnosed with periodontal disease, your periodontist might recommend a common non-surgical procedure called scaling and root planing. During this procedure, your tooth-root surfaces are cleaned to remove plaque and tartar from deep periodontal pockets and to smooth the root to remove bacterial toxins. Research suggests that scaling and root planing may reduce the risk of preterm birth in pregnant women with periodontal disease by up to 84 percent.⁴

¹ National Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies Coalition; Fast Facts for Families: Baby Your Oral Health: What You Need to Know About Oral Health and Pregnancy; 2005

^{2,4} Jeffcoat, Marjorie K. Periodontal Disease and Preterm Birth: Results of a Pilot Intervention Study. *Journal of Periodontology* August 2003, Vol. 74, No. 8, Pages 1214-1218

³ León, Rubén. Detection of *Porphyromonas gingivalis* in the Amniotic Fluid in Pregnant Women With a Diagnosis of Threatened Premature Labor. *Journal of Periodontology* 2007, Vol. 78, No. 7, Pages 1249-1255

⁵ Mullally, Brian H. Current Oral Contraceptive Status and Periodontitis in Young Adults; *Journal of Periodontology* 2007, Vol. 78, No. 6, Pages 1031-1036

⁶ Brennan, Renee M. Bacterial Species in Subgingival Plaque and Oral Bone Loss in Postmenopausal Women. *Journal of Periodontology* 2007, Vol. 78, No. 6, Pages 1051-1061



Attention Women of All Ages

It isn't only pregnant women who should pay special attention to their periodontal health; women of all ages should listen and take action!

Oral Contraceptives:

A recent study found that women taking oral contraceptive pills had more gingival bleeding upon probing and deeper periodontal pockets than those who were not taking oral contraceptive pills. It is important for women to alert their dental practitioners about any medications they are taking, such as oral contraceptive pills, because it is possible that their oral health may be affected.⁵

Menopause:

Another study showed that postmenopausal women with periodontal bacteria in their mouths were also more likely to have bone loss in the oral cavity, which can lead to tooth loss if not treated.⁶

At all stages of life it's important to seek dental care. Regular professional cleanings, good at-home care and periodontal evaluations can help you keep your teeth for a lifetime!

The American Academy of Periodontology Patient Page is a public service of the AAP and should not be used as a substitute for the care and advice of your personal periodontist. There may be variations in treatment that your periodontist will recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

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