The importance of dental health during pregnancy

Healthy mouth, healthy baby

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Did you know that women who have periodontal disease may be seven times more likely to have a baby that is premature or low birth weight? The rise in your hormones during pregnancy can cause pregnancy gingivitis and even pregnancy tumors on your gums. Your dental health during pregnancy is not only important for you, it is a protective factor for your baby, too. Keep reading to learn how to take care of your teeth and gums during pregnancy, as recommended by dental expert Dr Gene Sherman, senior vice president of professional relations for AlwaysCare Benefits.

Pregnancy can cause gingivitis

During pregnancy, your hormone levels dramatically increase. The rise in progesterone causes your gums to have an exaggerated response to plaque. According to Dr Sherman, this can cause gingivitis. He says, "Pregnant women many experience pregnancy gingivitis, especially during months two through eight." Symptoms include red, puffy or tender gums that tend to bleed while you brush or floss your teeth.

Pregnancy tumors on the gums can also occur. These localized overgrowths of gum tissue typically appear on the gums during the second trimester and are believed to be caused by a reaction to excess plaque. Pregnancy tumors tend to bleed easily and may have to be removed surgically after the baby is born.

Dental disease is dangerous for your baby

Periodontal disease has been linked to problem pregnancies. "Studies have shown a relationship between periodontal disease and preterm, low birth weight babies," warns Dr Sherman. "Chronic or acute infections caused by periodontal disease also have deleterious effects on both mother and baby."

Even if you do brush and floss daily, any changes in your teeth and gums should be examined by a dentist.

Six tips for dental health during pregnancy

Dr Sherman recommends the following tips to maintain your [dental health](#).

1. Be diligent about your oral hygiene. Frequent brushing, flossing and proper nutrition are most important in keeping your teeth and gums healthy.

2. See your dentist. Make sure you have had a recent visit to a dentist shortly before or after you become pregnant.

3. Ask questions. When you see your dentist, be sure to discuss the effects of pregnancy on your oral health and how your oral health affects [your baby](#).

4. Educate yourself. Learn as much as you can about the relationship between pregnancy and dental health. Information can be found at these websites:

- www.nidcr.nih.gov
- www.ada.org
- www.perio.org

5. Plan ahead. Whenever possible, take care of essential dental needs before planning to become pregnant. This will lower the potential for oral infections and their potential harmful effects on your pregnancy, as well as decrease the likelihood of stressful dental emergencies.

6. Find affordable dental care. To keep your dental costs down, check with insurance companies for [affordable](#) dental plans that are right for your dental needs. Dr Sherman advises, "Several companies, including Starmount Life Insurance and [AlwaysCare Benefits](#), offer individual dental policies (in most states). Outside of [dental insurance], there are community and dental school clinics."