



Pregnancy: How preventing gum disease is good for you and your baby!

By Dr Matthew Fleming & Dr Dana Horng



Pregnancy is an important period of time for both the mother's and baby's health. You'll want to think about taking good care of yourself and getting your baby's life off to a healthy start!

For a long time we've known that risk factors such as smoking, alcohol and drug use contribute to mothers having babies that are born prematurely and under a healthy weight level. Now evidence is mounting that suggests an additional risk factor—periodontal disease (gum disease, gum infection).

Can periodontal disease increase my risk of having a premature baby?

Research has linked gum disease in women to an increased risk of premature delivery. In a recent study of more than 100 women who were either pregnant or had recently given birth, the women with periodontal disease were seven times more likely to deliver a premature, low birth weight baby than those with healthy gums. (By comparison, combined alcohol use and smoking during pregnancy increase the probability by 2.5 times.)



Researchers believe that bacteria from diseased gums enter the bloodstream during eating or brushing. These bacteria may then affect the levels of prostaglandin (or PGE2). When the level of PGE2 rises significantly, usually in the ninth month of pregnancy, labour begins. But in women with serious gum disease, the level of PGE2 may rise too soon, triggering early labour.

Infection of any nature is cause for concern for pregnant women, as it poses a risk to the health of the baby. Hence, there is global consensus that women considering pregnancy undergo a periodontal evaluation.

Diet

Eating a balanced diet is vital to provide the correct amounts of nutrients to nourish both mother and child. What you eat during the nine months of pregnancy affects the development of your unborn child. This includes the child's teeth, as the development of baby teeth begins

between the third and sixth month of pregnancy. It is important that the mother receives sufficient amounts of nutrients; calcium, protein, phosphorous, and vitamins A, C and D.

During pregnancy, a desire to eat between meals is typical. Frequent snacking on carbohydrate-containing foods can be an invitation to tooth decay.