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Dental Care

Don't Ignore Oral Health During Pregnancy

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Some people think that gum disease only affects senior adults. But that's not the case. Data from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) shows us that



nearly half of individuals aged 30 and older exhibit signs of gum (periodontal) disease. Studies also demonstrate that gingivitis, the earliest stage of gum disease, affects up to 75% of pregnant women. Research continues to point to the link between gum disease and negative outcomes like pre-term birth.

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What is Pregnancy Gingivitis?

When you're pregnant, your body produces increased levels of the essential hormones progesterone and estrogen. The same hormonal surges that help the fetus develop may also increase the risk for gum inflammation. Pregnant women may notice gum swelling, tenderness, ↑ blood when brushing, all early indications of possible

gum disease. The good news is that, when caught early, gingivitis can normally be addressed with increased oral health diligence on the home front and regular visits to your dentist for professional cleaning to remove harmful dental plaque.

Taking Special Care of Your Teeth When Expecting

Some women facing morning sickness during pregnancy may unfortunately neglect their teeth because normal oral care makes them feel even more nauseated. If you simply can't face brushing your teeth when waking up, we suggest you at least rinse your mouth with warm water and then brush later when possible. Also, waiting for at least an hour after vomiting to brush can help prevent harmful stomach acids from weakening your protective teeth enamel.

Signs of Pregnancy Gingivitis

Your gums (gingiva) should always fit snugly around ↑ teeth. The color should range from light to dark pink and

brown tones. Ethnic pigmentation can mean some gums are naturally darker than others. You may notice your gums feel swollen or tender to the touch. Sometimes, you may not notice subtle changes until a more advantaged stage of gum disease, but you should be on the lookout for:

- Spitting out blood when brushing or flossing
- Swollen gums that feel tender to the touch
- Persistent bad breath not attributable to other causes
- Painful chewing

If too much time passes without proper intervention by your dental professional, plaque can spread below the gum line, causing a chronic inflammatory situation where "pockets" will occur between your gums and teeth. If not treated, this recession can deepen, become infected and destroy so much gum and bone tissue that your teeth can become loose or need to be pulled. There is no cure for periodontal disease once it goes beyond the gingivitis stage, but periodontists offer numerous treatments to keep the disease from progressing, including gum and

bone grafts, guided tissue regeneration and LANAP® laser treatments.

Periodontal Disease and Adverse Pregnancy Outcomes

While science is still attempting to fully understand the exact causal relationship, both the CDC and March of Dimes show us that severe gum disease is associated with pre-term birth (before 37 weeks) and low-birth weight. And we know that pre-term babies could face more health issues than those babies born at full term. Other negative outcomes that are being associated with periodontal disease, and still being studied, include low birth weight (perhaps linked to pre-term deliveries) and maternal pre-eclampsia.

Moms-to-Be: Don't Ignore Your Oral Health

If you are pregnant, or planning to get pregnant, be sure to tell your dental professionals. Individuals who already



present with moderate-to-severe gum disease could be at higher risk of delivering early. Now's not the time to ignore your dental health or to stop your scheduled visits to the dentist for any routine cleanings, dental work and exams.

Also, keep in mind that eating plenty of vegetables, fruits, and dairy products will not only be good for you but may help your baby's teeth, which, during the third and sixth months of gestation, are starting to form. Limiting food and drinks high in sugar can help you protect your teeth. If cravings for sweets or unhealthy foods occur, be sure to brush! As dental professionals, our job isn't to scare you – it's to encourage you to try to make sure you take care of your teeth and gums at all times, which certainly includes when you're bringing a precious new life into the world.

Dr. Eric Schoenebeck is a board-certified periodontist and dental implant surgeon. He provides regenerative periodontal care, including LANAP® laser treatment and dental implant surgery. at the Ambler, PA office of the [Pennsylvania Center for Dental Implants and Periodontics](#).



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