

Pregnant? Brush and Floss.... PLEASE

Taking good care of your teeth while pregnant can impact the health of your unborn child.

Although the care of neonates has come a long way in the past 50 years, babies are healthier when they are born on time. Prematurity can result in a whole host of problems so it makes sense to do whatever possible to carry your baby to term before delivering.

As pediatricians, we are focused on the health and well-being of children. Getting children off to a good start is key to that mission.

You might not realize this, but hormonal changes during pregnancy can cause the gums to react differently to germs that cause gingivitis. Up to 75% of pregnant women will experience pregnancy-related gingivitis.

Over the past 6 or eight years, there has been a growing body of evidence showing that mother's oral health impacts her risk for delivering a baby early or with very low birth weight. Gum disease and periodontal disease are associated with prematurity and low birth weight. This probably has something to do with the inflammation but nobody is absolutely certain. We also have some scientific evidence that improving oral health and hygiene reduces the likelihood of delivering baby prematurely or with very low birth weight by 68%.

These findings are significant since there are some simple interventions during pregnancy that can reduce the chance of delivering a premature or very low birth weight infant. Consider getting an evaluation by your dentist as part of your prenatal care. Follow the advice of your dentist and/or hygienist regarding flossing, brushing, and any special rinsing. Notify your dentist if you see signs of gum disease like swollen or bleeding gums. Tell your pregnant friends to seek attention as well.

Other simple interventions that can give your baby the best start possible:

- Take your prenatal vitamins
- Drink plenty of fluids
- Consider getting probiotics (like those found in some yogurt)
- Ask your doctor if you're due for any immunizations and get them (especially the flu vaccine when it comes out)
- Take fish oil supplements
- Exercise and eat fresh food

Most importantly, enjoy this magical time in your life by relaxing and getting in touch with your partner and yourself.

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