

Oral Health During Pregnancy

Does a woman lose calcium from her teeth during pregnancy?

It is a myth that calcium is lost from the mother's teeth during pregnancy. The calcium your baby needs is provided by your diet, not by your teeth. If dietary calcium is inadequate, however, your body will provide this mineral from stores in your bones. An adequate intake of dairy products – the primary source of calcium – or the supplements your obstetrician may recommend will help ensure that you get all the calcium you need during your pregnancy.

Does pregnancy affect my gums?

During pregnancy, your body's hormone levels rise considerably. Gingivitis, especially common during the second to eighth months of pregnancy, may cause red, puffy or tender gums that tend to bleed when you brush. This sensitivity is an exaggerated response to plaque and is caused by an increased level of progesterone in your system. Your dentist may recommend more frequent cleanings during your second trimester or early third trimester to help you avoid problems.

What can I do to keep my mouth healthy during pregnancy?

To help prevent tooth decay and periodontal disease, brush your teeth thoroughly twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste to remove plaque. Be sure to clean between your teeth daily with floss or interdental cleaners. Ask your dentist or hygienist to show you how to brush and floss correctly. When choosing oral care products, look for those that display the American Dental Association's Seal of Acceptance, your assurance that they have met ADA standards of safety and effectiveness.

Is periodontal disease linked to preterm low birthweight babies?

Studies have shown a relationship between periodontal disease and preterm, low birthweight babies. In fact, pregnant women with periodontal disease may be seven times more likely to have a baby that's born too early and too small. The likely culprit 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.

What if I'm diagnosed with periodontal disease during pregnancy?

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 smooth the root to remove bacterial toxins. Research suggests that scaling and root planing may reduce the risk of preterm births in pregnant women with periodontal disease. The added bonus is that the procedure should alleviate many of the uncomfortable symptoms associated with pregnancy gingivitis, such as swelling and tenderness of the gums.

As you make your way through the "to-dos," remember to check off a visit to the dentist or periodontist. This baby step benefits you and your unborn baby.