

The Massachusetts Dental Society (MDS) is pleased to make this publication available to our member dentists as a way of communicating important oral health information to their patients.

Information in WORD OF MOUTH comes from dental health care professionals of the MDS and other leading professional dental organizations, including the American Dental Association. If you have any questions about specific content that may affect your oral health, please contact your dentist. For timely news regarding oral health, visit the "For the Public" section of the MDS Web site at www.massdental.org.

Your comments and suggestions regarding WORD OF MOUTH are always welcome. All correspondence and requests for additional copies may be forwarded to Melissa Carman, Managing Editor of Publications and Web Site, Massachusetts Dental Society, Two Willow Street, Suite 200, Southborough, MA 01745-1027, or email mcarman@massdental.org.

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A Bundle of Joy and a healthy mouth

A woman's body goes through many changes when she is expecting a baby. Weight gain, breast changes, swollen feet, back pain, and hemorrhoids are just a few examples of the fun things to expect. But some moms-to-be may not be aware that, as a result of pregnancy, their teeth and gums also undergo changes that can have health ramifications. Since oral health is a part of overall health, it comes as no surprise that maintaining a healthy mouth during pregnancy can lead to a healthier mom and a healthier baby.

During pregnancy, the body's hormone levels rise considerably, and pregnant women can see an increased chance of developing gingivitis, a milder and reversible form of periodontal disease. (Left untreated, gingivitis may lead to a more serious, destructive form of periodontal disease called periodontitis.) Gingivitis, which is especially common during the second to eighth months of pregnancy, may cause red, puffy, or tender gums that bleed when brushed. This sensitivity is an exaggerated response to plaque and is caused by an increased level of progesterone in the body. More frequent cleanings during the second trimester or early third trimester can help expectant mothers avoid gingivitis.

According to the American Dental Association, another oral condition that can occur during pregnancy is something called "pregnancy tumors." Less scary than they sound, though still a concern, pregnancy tumors are localized growths or swellings of gum tissue that appear between the teeth during the second trimester. Believed to be related to excess plaque, these growths are red with a "mulberry-like" surface and have a tendency to bleed. They are often surgically removed after the baby is born.

Lastly, studies have shown a relationship between periodontal disease and the delivery of preterm, low-birth-weight babies. According to the American Academy of Periodontology, pregnant women with periodontal disease may be seven times more likely to have a baby born too early and too small. Low-birth-weight babies

have a higher incidence of breathing problems, anemia, jaundice, mental retardation, cerebral palsy, congestive heart failure, and malnutrition. Researchers believe the cause is *prostaglandin*, a labor-inducing chemical found in oral bacteria. Very high levels of prostaglandin are found in women with severe cases of periodontal disease. Periodontal disease is caused by a bacterial infection that attacks the gums, ligaments, and bone in the mouth. Three out of four adults are affected by periodontal disease or gum disease at some point in their lives; however, women are especially susceptible to periodontal disease during pregnancy. Periodontal disease can be treated safely during pregnancy with a procedure called scaling and root planing, which cleans out the pocket between the tooth and gum.

If you are pregnant or thinking about becoming pregnant, the Massachusetts Dental Society (MDS) recommends that you include a periodontal screening as part of your prenatal care. The MDS also advises pregnant women to maintain good oral health, including brushing regularly—two to three times daily—with a soft-bristled toothbrush and fluoride toothpaste, and flossing daily. And in addition to all of the appointments with your obstetrician, you should be sure to schedule regular visits with your dentist to further ensure your oral health and the health of your baby. 

"Women are especially susceptible to periodontal disease during pregnancy."



For more information on pregnancy and your oral health, contact the Massachusetts Dental Society at **(800) 342-8747** or visit www.massdental.org.

