



MOUTH CHANGES DURING PREGNANCY

Physical and emotional changes during pregnancy affect the oral health of women greatly. Pregnant women are of greater risk for gum disease, and for the development of gum growths. In addition, some of these changes can adversely impact the developing baby. However, by being aware and prepared, these risks can be managed and you can stay on the path of health and well being.

THE RISKS:

Gum Disease

The most common mouth risk during pregnancy is gum disease called gingivitis which occurs in 60% to 70% of pregnant women. This results in swelling of the gums, easy bleeding of the gums, and sore gums especially to flossing. What happens is that the hormonal changes that pregnancy produces also creates an exaggerated inflammatory response to plaque and the bacteria in plaque. This is what creates all the swelling and bleeding of the gums. The danger is that this infection can wind up creating more long term damage to the gums or even the jaw bone. So, after the pregnancy is over these changes might end up staying leaving you with periodontal disease. Obviously, women with untreated gum disease during pregnancy will most likely have gum disease afterwards. Interestingly, women taking oral contraceptives, which hormonally mimic pregnancy by increasing levels of the hormones estrogen and progesterone, may also experience similar gum disease issues caused by an exaggerated response to the bacteria in plaque.

Pregnancy Tumor

This is a condition that is not really a tumor like cancer. It is a growth of gum tissue in a specific area and it can become quite large. It usually occurs in areas where the gingivitis and where lots of bacteria in plaque is in the mix. It occurs in anywhere from 0% to 9.6% of pregnant women. The tumor grows very fast, and may end up requiring surgical removal for complete healing. The good news is that the tumor partially regresses after the pregnancy to some degree.

Generalized Tooth Mobility

This is probably related to the degree of gum disease that was breaking down the attachment of the gum and bone to the tooth. Also, this can create some mineral breakdown of the crest of the jaw bone around a tooth allowing it to become loose. Usually this condition reverses itself after the pregnancy is over.

Dry Mouth

The hormonal changes during pregnancy may cause dryness of the mouth. About 44% of pregnant women in a recent study had persistent dryness of the mouth. Also, some medications can dry the mouth and put you at risk for tooth decay. Fortunately, drinking 100 oz of water daily and chewing sugarless candy or gum will alleviate this problem.

Preterm Low Birth Weight Babies

Several studies have hinted that gum and bone disease can adversely affect the mother and unborn child causing the delivery of preterm low birth weight babies. In one study the presence of preexisting gum disease in the second trimester of pregnancy increased the risk of preterm birth by 4 1/2 to 7 times. This is an area that is constantly being researched!!

HOW TO MANAGE:

The best defense is a great offense! Take the initiative and proactively keep plaque away and your teeth cleaned well. The common denominator in all of these mouth changes is plaque and the body's unusual reaction to it during pregnancy. So, work with your dentist in cleaning your teeth professionally during your pregnancy and monitoring your diet for carbohydrates which allow plaque to create disease. Have your dentist check for any loose teeth and to make sure your gums stay firmly attached to your teeth. Be healthy and thrive!!

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