

Dental Treatment Halves the Risk of Premature Births for Pregnant Women with Gum Disease

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Pregnant women with untreated gum inflammation are far more likely to have preterm deliveries, or give birth to babies with low weight.

New research from the University of Sydney shows that even mild gum inflammation (gingivitis) can trigger premature births, but suitable dental treatment halves this risk.

This is welcome news for around 70 per cent of expectant mothers who develop gingivitis during pregnancy ? due to hormonal changes, sugar cravings and frequent vomiting.

More than 1,000 patients from three randomised control trials were involved in the study, which was recently published in the Journal of Oral Health and Preventive Dentistry.

?Our study shows that if gum inflammation is treated during pregnancy, the risk of a baby being born preterm

is reduced by approximately 50 percent, or the birthweight increases around 100 grams in babies born with low birth weight," said senior author Professor Joerg Eberhard, Chair of Lifespan Oral Health at the University of Sydney School of Dentistry.

"In fact, the risk was halved if the mother had good oral health, which is a compelling finding.?

Most people don?t realise that untreated oral infection can cause or worsen inflammation in other parts of the body, and even reach the placenta.

The good news is that gingivitis can be easily reversed before it progresses to periodontitis (severe gum disease). Treatment usually involves deep-cleaning, mouth rinses and antibiotics for more serious infections.

But there?s a challenge: many women avoid visiting the dentist while pregnant ? when they need it most ? because they mistakenly believe that all dental treatments are unsafe during gestation.

Dr Alistair Graham from Mona Vale Dental says bleeding gums is a common symptom for his pregnant patients, who are often shocked when he points out the whole body can be affected by gum disease.

?My patients want the best for their unborn babies, unfortunately they?re usually in the dark about the dangers of gingivitis, because there isn?t enough public health awareness about this preventable and treatable condition during pregnancy,? Dr Graham said.

He?s particularly concerned about pregnant women with a medical condition called hyperemesis gravidarum (HG). Some women with HG may vomit more than 30 times a day. Gastric acid from frequent vomiting erodes tooth enamel and heightens the risk of tooth decay and gum disease.

?It?s not uncommon for expectant mothers with hyperemesis gravidarum to go for weeks, even months, without brushing their teeth,? Dr Graham said.

?The simple act of using a toothbrush or mouthwash can cause gagging, making cleaning impossible.?

Early treatment is vital for all pregnant women with gingivitis, to give their baby the best start to life. Even better is to prevent gum inflammation from occurring in the first place, by being extra diligent about dental hygiene.

Dr Graham created the Ultimate Guide to Dental Care while Pregnant to raise awareness about the dangers of gingivitis for unborn babies. He also covers common dental problems during gestation, symptoms to look out for, treatment options, pregnancy-safe painkillers, natural remedies and oral hygiene tips for women who

are too nauseous to brush their teeth normally.

?One tip is to brush your back teeth before cleaning the rest of your mouth, which allows you to avoid the taste buds on your tongue for as long as possible,? he said.

He?s urging all pregnant women to clean their teeth as best as they can in the circumstances, and to visit their dentist at the first signs of gum inflammation or tooth decay.

?A strong oral hygiene routine can go a long way towards improving your pregnancy outcomes, but even if you have oral inflammation, this can be successfully treated without harming your unborn baby.?

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Mona Vale Dental and Implant Centre

Mona Vale Dental's highly skilled team of dentists, hygienists and support staff provide the highest quality of dental care to thousands of people across Sydney's Northern Beaches.

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