



MEDIA RELEASE

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Pregnant women need to address oral health

*Women lose one tooth for every pregnancy.
Never get your teeth fixed when you're pregnant; dental aesthetic may harm your baby.*

Both of these myths have long been dispelled by medical research, but new studies show that there is a connection between oral health and healthy pregnancies and babies.

“Pregnancy brings challenges for the teeth and gums that require good management,” said Dr. Linda Niessen in a recent presentation at the Alberta Dental Association + College’s annual congress. “Gingival inflammation during pregnancy affects 60-75% of pregnant women, even those who practice good oral care. Pregnancy changes the tissues in all areas of the body, including the mouth, and breaks down the natural barriers that prevent infection. Hormonal and vascular changes exaggerate the inflammation; sometimes it becomes localized and presents as a sore known as a ‘pregnancy tumor.’ If it is very large, it must be removed; if left untreated during the pregnancy, it will still be there after the pregnancy.”

A more frightening result of oral infections is a recently discovered link between periodontal disease and low birth weight and pre-eclampsia (premature birth). Researchers, most notably Dr. Marjorie Jeffcoat from the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, have found that even mild to moderate periodontal disease can increase the risk of premature birth 3-4 times, while severe oral disease raises the risk to 7-8 times more likely.

The solution is relatively simple: maintain good daily oral care (brushing, flossing) and visit the dentist for professional cleaning, scaling and root cleaning during your second trimester. In Jeffcoat’s study of 3,000 pregnancies, professional cleaning of women at five months into their pregnancy halved the incidence of low birth rate; when scaling and root cleaning were added, the risk was reduced by 75%.

Many dentists advocate a pre-pregnancy visit as well, so that any dental problems can be detected and resolved before the pregnancy commences.

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“The conclusion is that oral care should be part of overall health care for women who are pregnant or planning to be,” said Niessen. “Good oral care is an important preventive measure during pregnancy, as important as taking folic acid. One cleaning at five months can make a difference. An expectant mother has enough stress in her body while growing a baby; she does not need to be fighting an oral infection at the same time.”

For further information on oral health for women, talk to your dentist or go to the Alberta Dental Association + College website www.abda.ab.ca.

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