

The following information from the AAP Web site is located at:  
<http://www.perio.org/consumer/pregnancy.htm>

## Baby Steps to Healthy Pregnancy and On-Time Delivery



**The health of your gums may affect the health of your baby-to-be.**

[Affect on teeth and gums](#)

[Linked to preterm low birth weight babies](#)

[Periodontal disease during pregnancy](#)

[Reduce the risk of premature births](#)

[Links to info on oral health & pregnancy](#)

The test came back and it's positive – you're pregnant. Your mind is rattled with excitement, and you have created a “to-do.” While your “to-do” list and questions continue to grow, it's important to take the necessary steps to ensure an on-time and safe arrival of your most precious cargo yet.

You've probably heard a few old wives' tales about pregnancy, including “A tooth lost for every child.” While it seems far-fetched, it actually is based loosely in fact. Your teeth and gums are affected by pregnancy, just as other tissues in your body. You may not be aware that the health of your gums may also affect the health of your baby-to-be.

### **How does pregnancy affect your teeth and gums?**

About half of women experience pregnancy gingivitis. This condition can be uncomfortable and cause swelling, bleeding, redness or tenderness in the gum tissue. Conversely, a more advanced oral health condition called periodontal disease (a serious gum infection that destroys attachment fibers and supporting bone that hold teeth in the mouth) may affect the health of your baby.

### **Is periodontal disease linked to preterm low birthweight babies?**

Studies have shown a relationship between periodontal disease and preterm, low birth weight 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.

## **Premature births: the answers can't come soon enough**

According to the March of Dimes, premature births have soared to become the number one obstetric problem in the United States. Many premature babies come into the world with serious health problems. Those who survive may suffer life-long consequences, from cerebral palsy and mental retardation to blindness.

The March of Dimes has launched a \$75 million, five-year campaign to raise public awareness and reduce rates of preterm birth and increase research to find the cause. Until all of the answers are in, the March of Dimes recommends the following to reduce the risk and/or effects of a premature birth:

- Consume a multivitamin containing 400 micrograms of the B vitamin folic acid before and in the early months of pregnancy.

- Stop smoking.

- Stop drinking and/or using illicit drugs, or prescription or over-the-counter drugs (including herbal preparations) not prescribed by a doctor aware of the pregnancy.

- Once pregnant, get early regular prenatal care, eat a balanced diet with enough calories (usually about 300 more than a woman normally eats), and gain enough weight (25 to 35 pounds is usually recommended).

- Talk to your doctor about signs of premature labor, and what to do if you show any of the warning signs.

## **Other Resources**

- [Information about premature births at March of Dimes Web site](#)

- [The National Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies Coalition](#)

- [View a free AAP brochure sample on women and periodontal disease.](#)