



Periodontal Disease & Low Birthweight

For your dental health.

Throughout your pregnancy, you'll hear a lot about how your health affects your baby's health. Now, researchers have discovered that women with periodontal disease are seven times more likely to deliver pre-term, low birthweight babies than women with healthy gums.

What is periodontal disease?

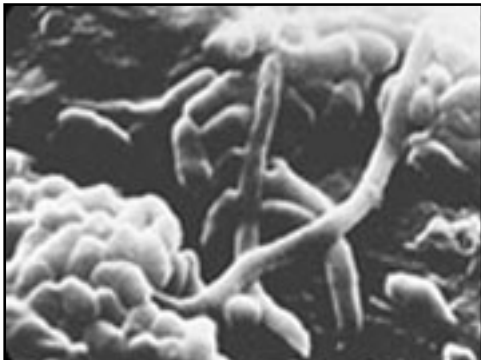
The main cause of periodontal disease, also called gum disease, is the accumulation of plaque. Plaque is the sticky film of food and bacteria that forms constantly on your teeth. If all of the plaque isn't removed each day, it builds up and mineralizes to become tartar, also called calculus.

If tartar isn't removed, it begins to accumulate on the root surfaces. Bacteria that cause periodontal disease thrive in tartar where they produce toxins. It's these toxins, combined with your body's response to them, that destroys bone around your teeth. Professional help is required to remove tartar, because there's no way to remove it at home. A toothbrush or floss won't even budge it.



Expectant mothers need healthy gums

The link between periodontal disease and low birthweight



Bacteria cause periodontal disease

Scientists believe the link between periodontal disease and pre-term birth may be caused by the body's reaction to the bacteria in the infected gums caused by even mild forms of periodontal disease. Gums infected with periodontal disease are toxic reservoirs of disease-causing bacteria. The toxins produced by the bacteria attack the gums, ligaments, and bone that surround your teeth, creating infected pockets that are similar to large open wounds within your mouth. The infected pockets provide access to your bloodstream, allowing bacteria to enter and then travel throughout your body.

Your body reacts to the infection in your gums by producing prostaglandins, a natural fatty acid that's involved in inflammation control and smooth muscle contractions. During your pregnancy, the level of prostaglandins gradually increases, peaking when you go into labor. According to one theory, if extra prostaglandins are produced in response to an infection in your gums, your body may interpret it as a signal to go into labor, and your baby could be born too soon and too small.



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Preventing gum infection

Pre-term babies aren't as healthy as full-term babies, and complications caused by early delivery or low birth weight account for 60 percent of infant deaths. The good news is that you can prevent complications resulting from an infection in your gums by:

- flossing daily;
- brushing at least twice a day with a soft-bristled brush and fluoride toothpaste (If toothpaste makes you feel nauseated, brush with plain water and then rinse with an anti-plaque or fluoridated mouthwash.);
- and seeing us regularly so we can clean your teeth as needed and monitor the effectiveness of your dental hygiene routine.



A healthy, happy baby