

Guarding against periodontal disease in pregnancy

Periodontal disease can put an unborn baby at risk and pregnant moms must guard against this with increased dental hygiene.



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"Periodontal disease is a bacterial infection that affects the gums and surrounding structures. Symptoms include inflammation, soreness and bleeding leading to pain and possibly tooth loss for the sufferer. It is caused, amongst other factors, by improper oral hygiene procedures that lead to a build-up of plaque. As a bacterial infection it poses several health risks for unborn babies," explains leading Johannesburg dentist and Oral-B expert, Dr Imraan Hoosen.

"Pregnant women are more susceptible to periodontal disease because of elevated hormone levels that increase blood volume and capillary fragility. Furthermore, periodontal disease has been associated with pre-term labour (37 weeks), low birth weight (less than 2500 g), pregnancy loss, late miscarriage and preeclampsia, which is why it is vital for mothers-to-be to take extra care of their oral health."

Recent research, published by the Journal of Periodontology, suggests that visiting an oral hygienist or dentist cuts the risks of pre-term birth by a third. According to the study, severe gum infections do cause an increase in the production of chemicals, which induce labour.

"While you may think brushing with a manual tooth brush is good enough, did you know that it leaves half the plaque behind? For this reason, I always recommend a power toothbrush to my pregnant patients. These are clinically proven to remove more plaque when compared to their manual counterparts and are essential for the maintenance of healthy teeth and gums as well as removing the plaque and tartar that can lead to increased risk to unborn babies," he concludes.

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