New studies show a link between gum disease and pre-term, low birthweight babies. Preventive dental care improves oral and general health and is safe for mother and child.
If you are pregnant or thinking about becoming pregnant, remember your oral health care. Your oral health is an important part of your overall health. Good dental habits help prevent oral problems. Dental habits affect the health of your unborn child.

- During your pregnancy, you may have a surge in hormones. This can change how your body reacts to the bacteria in plaque.

- Plaque is a sticky, clear film of bacteria that covers your teeth. If plaque isn’t cleaned daily, it can harden into tartar. This can increase your risk of gingivitis; swollen and tender gums that are more likely to bleed.

- Pregnancy gingivitis mostly occurs in the second to eighth month. If you already have gingivitis, the condition could worsen during your pregnancy. Left untreated, gingivitis can lead to gum disease.

- Excess plaque can lead to extra gum tissue between the teeth. If you have this, see your dentist.

It’s very important to maintain good oral health during pregnancy. Studies show you may be at a higher risk for pre-term delivery if you have severe gum disease. This in turn increases the risk of having a low birthweight baby. If you notice any changes in your mouth see your dentist.

When your mouth is healthy, chances are your overall health is good too.

All of these are excellent reasons why it is important to protect your oral health.

**What you can do**

- **Brush twice a day and floss at least once a day.** These basic oral health practices will help reduce plaque buildup and keep your mouth healthy.

- **Have your teeth cleaned.** If you are pregnant or suspect you are pregnant:
  - Schedule a checkup in your first trimester for a cleaning. If your pregnancy is further along, call your dentist for the first available appointment.
  - Your dentist will assess your oral health. Your dentist will map out a dental plan for the rest of your pregnancy.

- The American Dental Association recommends avoiding routine or elective x-rays during pregnancy.

- Always call your dentist if you have any questions or concerns.

**Diet, pregnancy and oral health**

What you eat during your pregnancy affects your unborn child. Your baby’s teeth begin to develop between the third and sixth month of pregnancy. It’s important to get an ample amount of nutrients. Calcium, protein, phosphorous, and vitamins A, C and D are very important.

**Calcium, pregnancy and teeth**

It is a myth that calcium is lost from the mother’s teeth during pregnancy. The calcium your baby needs is provided by your diet, not by your teeth. If you do not get enough calcium, your body will take this mineral from stores in your bones. You should eat and drink plenty of dairy products. Dairy products contain a lot of calcium. Your doctor can also give you supplements to make sure you get enough calcium.

**Between-meal snacking**

When you’re eating for two, you may want to eat between meals. Snacking on foods such as candy, cookies or potato chips can lead to tooth decay.

Eat healthy, well-balanced meals made up of foods from the five major food groups:

- Breads, cereals and whole grains
- Fruits
- Vegetables
- Meat, fish, poultry, beans and nuts
- Milk, yogurt and cheese

When you do eat between meals, make healthy food choices; eat raw fruits, fresh vegetables and dairy products. Always follow your doctor’s advice about diet when you are pregnant.