

# Gum Disease and Pregnancy

Recent studies have also shown a relationship between the **bacteria** found in gum disease and preterm, low-birth-weight babies. In fact, pregnant women with periodontal disease may be seven times more likely to have a premature baby. Low-birth-weight babies have a higher incidence of breathing problems, anemia, jaundice, mental retardation, cerebral palsy, congestive heart failure, and malnutrition. The likely cause of this 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.

Additionally, gingivitis and its associated **bacteria** are especially common during the second to eighth months of pregnancy and can result in red, puffy, or tender gums that bleed when you brush your teeth. These problems are caused by an increased level of the hormone progesterone in your system. That's why if you're having a baby, it's very important to have regular dental checkups. During your pregnancy, your dentist may recommend more frequent cleaning to help you avoid any potential problems.

And it's not only during pregnancy when women are at a higher risk for oral health problems. During other times of increased hormone levels, such as puberty, menstrual cycles, and menopause, women may also be more susceptible to plaque and **bacteria**.

**\*Information provided by the Massachusetts State Dental Society**