

# Low Birth Weight

## Periodontal disease and pregnancy

Throughout your pregnancy, you will be hearing a lot about how your health affects your baby's health. Now, researchers have discovered that women with periodontal disease may be seven times more likely to deliver a pre-term, low birth weight baby than women with healthy gums.

## What is periodontal disease?

Periodontal disease is an infection of the teeth, gums, and bone that surrounds your teeth. It is caused by the bacteria that live in plaque, the sticky film of food and bacteria that forms constantly on your teeth. The bacteria infect the tooth roots and cause pockets of infection to form in the gums.

## The connection to low birth weight

Scientists believe the link between periodontal disease and pre-term birth is due to the body's reaction to the bacteria that exist in gums infected with even mild periodontal disease.

Gums infected with advanced periodontal disease can be compared to a nine-square-inch open wound around your teeth, offering significant opportunity for harmful bacteria to enter your blood and travel throughout your body. Your body reacts to this infection by producing prostaglandins, a natural hormone-like chemical.



Bacteria in plaque



During a normal pregnancy, the level of prostaglandins produced by your body gradually increases and then peaks when you go into labor. If extra prostaglandins are being produced in response to an infection in your gums, one theory is that your body may interpret this as a signal to go into labor, and your baby could be born too soon and too small.

Unfortunately, pre-term babies have a higher risk for disease and disabilities, such as breathing and lung problems.

## Prevent periodontal disease

The good news is that you can prevent periodontal disease and reduce your risk of having a pre-term baby by flossing daily and brushing your teeth after each meal with a soft-bristled toothbrush and fluoride toothpaste. If toothpaste makes you feel nauseated, you can brush with plain water and rinse with an anti-plaque or fluoridated mouthwash.

Make sure you also come see us regularly so we can clean your teeth as needed and monitor the health of your mouth.