The Pregnancy Diaries: Pregnancy Gingivitis Is A Thing

By Ana-Marija Dolaskie — September 15, 2017

Last week, I was indulging in a bag of Doritos when suddenly, a sharp potato chip became lodged in the roof of my mouth, close to my front teeth. The pain was so blunt, the gums surrounding my front teeth immediately bulged. I can't even explain the feeling. As the days went by, the swelling of my gums worsened. I had a hard time eating and even started speaking with a bit of a lisp. I finally went to the dentist, who examined my mouth and advised me that I also have pregnancy gingivitis [1], hence, why the swelling wasn't diminishing fast enough.

Of all the dreadful pregnancy symptom I thought I would experience, I did not predict this one. Heartburn?? What heartburn? Backaches? Step aside. There's a pregnancy symptom in town I didn't even know existed — until now. Inflamed gums during pregnancy, also known as pregnancy gingivitis, are not uncommon. They're also not without pain. And for someone who regularly brushes, flosses, and gets a star from the dentist each time, this came as a complete shock. But even I was not immune to this symptom. Pregnancy gingivitis is caused by the hormonal changes that increase blood flow to the gum tissue. This makes the gums more sensitive, easily irritated, and swollen — especially in the third trimester. And it typically comes without warning, or in my case, from trauma to the mouth.

Perhaps the worst part of the ordeal is that mothers-to-be should steer clear of nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDS) such as ibuprofen and naproxen during pregnancy, as they pose some risks [2] to the baby. Acetaminophen was the closest I could get to some relief, which wasn't much. My dentist prescribed an oral rinse containing Chlorhexidine gluconate, a germicidal mouthwash that reduces bacteria in the mouth.
Within a few days, the swelling of my gums went down, although complete normalcy won't be regained until after delivery. Although pregnancy does not automatically ruin your teeth, it can evoke a number of dental problems, including tooth decay. Because the baby absorbs much of the calcium from your diet to aid in bone development, the proper amount of calcium intake (about 1000mg daily) is also important. You can get calcium in your diet by drinking milk (I typically drink 2-3 glasses per day), and eat calcium-rich foods like yogurt, spinach, kale, almonds, and cheese. And perhaps avoid the potato chips for the time being, as I am sure the scale will thank me.