Oral Health During Pregnancy with Dr. Bernard Baseri

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IN THIS EPISODE

Your mouth and your pregnancy are more connected than you think. Los Angeles-based dentist and father of four Dr. Bernard Baseri joins Dr. Elliot Berlin, DC to explain the often-overlooked links between oral health and pregnancy — and simple steps expectant parents can take to protect their health and their baby's, before, during, and after pregnancy.

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DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: My guest today is a Los Angeles-based dentist and father of four. He's passionate about the often overlooked connection between oral health and pregnancy, and today he'll explain why dental care before, during, and after pregnancy matters more than most people realize and give us simple steps expectant parents can take to protect their health and their baby's health. I'm pregnancy-focused chiropractor Dr. Elliott Berlin, and you're listening to the Informed Pregnancy podcast. Dr. Bernard Basiri, welcome to the podcast.

DR. BERNARD BASERI: Hi, everyone. I'm Dr. Bernard Basiri. Nice meeting you all.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Nice to meet you, and I know that you're passionate about oral health in general, and I'm always hearing about importance of oral health during pregnancy and beyond in ways that we don't necessarily think about, and I'm really interested about talking about it and learning some tips our listeners can take home, practical tips, things that they can act upon. But first, let's start at the beginning. Where are you from originally?

DR. BERNARD BASERI: I was born in Iran. I came here when I was 14 years old. I was fortunate enough. My parents really pushed for education, and I have gone to local universities here, USC and UCLA. I earned my dental degree from USC School of Dentistry. Prior to me becoming a dentist, I was a dental ceramist. I was sort of creating beautiful smiles for all the other patients, and I became more curious about what can I do more, and that led me to go to dental school and really become

more passionate about the field of dentistry. As I started practicing a little bit more, I really understood from others that how often pregnancy and oral health is overlooked. The connection between the two is so significant and

DR. BERNARD BASERI: so important that I really dedicated part of my practice to oral health and pregnancy and the

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: mumps. So we're going to get into the night. I wonder, well, first of all, welcome to America. Thank you. Age 14. I mean, you grew up in Iran. What was that like?

DR. BERNARD BASERI: Well, I remember going through the Iran and Iraq war. It was very traumatic for me as I look back, but I really thank my parents to really instill in me a really strong character, and they built me to be resilient. Through hard work, I have seen how my parents really wanted us to succeed, and it's honestly a dream coming true because I'm able to pass those experiences to my kids. I show them what hard work means. Be persistent. Really be true and passionate about what you do, and I truly enjoy every day of my work with my colleagues, my patients. I put a smile on my patients' face. I make them healthy, and it's not really work. For me, it's a playground. I'm having fun. When you left Iran, could you just leave or

DR. BERNARD BASERI: did you have to kind of sneak out? No. My parents, they had to really bribe so many different people, and it wasn't easy. They wanted to leave after they got married, but unfortunately, it wasn't possible. They had to wait at least, I guess, 14 years, and my dad left everything behind. He left his business behind, his very successful civil engineer, but unfortunately, the situation presented itself that he had to put family first and come here, and that's basically what I really admire about my dad is he put his family on top of everything else. Nothing was more important than his kids. He wanted us to be successful. He wanted us to do well, and more importantly, he wanted us to really help the

DR. BERNARD BASERI: next generation. He always says, do your best and let that be an example to others.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: It's hard. You only get one chance to get that right.

DR. BERNARD BASERI: That's true. Look, I always say I wish I had another brother. At the time, he wasn't really feasible for my parents to have another child, so it's only me and my sister. She's five years younger than me, but now I have my kids. They're sort of like my brother, my younger brother, so I try to teach them what I really truly believe to be number one, which is first, do your best and let everything else follow.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: How did you get into dental ceramics?

DR. BERNARD BASERI: Well, the story behind me becoming a dental ceramist and a lab technician is very interesting. At the age of 14, I really wanted to really carve my path for the future. I came here, and I knew that I had to work hard because coming to a new country, everything is new to you. Language is new. Culture is new. When I went to actually get my wisdom teeth removed, I was laying down in a dentist's chair at the time. I have seen him have all his instruments laid out. It was very fascinating to me because I remember going to work with my dad. As a civil engineer, he had so

many different tools that he was showing me sometimes how to use. I got to play with them. I felt that was really cool and interesting. That kind of started getting me

DR. BERNARD BASERI: interested into dentistry. I spoke with my dentist and said, you know what? One should come here and work if you want. Help me serialize instruments over the summer. See if you're interested. That's how my path to dentistry started.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Wow, right away.

DR. BERNARD BASERI: I wanted to become a dentist at the age of 14. I'm really happy that I chose this profession because I'm really and truly passionate about my field. Not only I get to play with all the tools, all the fancy tools that I have, but also I get to help people. I get people to have self-confidence. A lot of people, they unfortunately are embarrassed about their smile, embarrassed about their oral health. I have patients who say COVID was the best thing that ever happened to them. I said, how come? They said, we started wearing masks because I didn't want to show my teeth. That really hits hard when you are not able to go to a job interview or you feel that you can't go on a date or you can't really socialize because

DR. BERNARD BASERI: you're embarrassed to smile. Even in your pictures, I have patients I said, I never smile in my photos, but after what you have done for me, I feel I'm a free person. I can smile. I can laugh. People always tell me, my gosh, you are a different person. You're more lively. Having a healthy smile, number one, but also having an attractive smile really affects self-confidence. More importantly, it helps the hormones, happy hormones, the endorphins to get secreted. Eventually, it affects your health overall as well. It's just not your mouth. Our mouth is the gateway to the rest of our body.

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: Yeah. It sounds like also not just the body, but also the mind being mentally healthy because you're proud of the way you look. Also, it's the gateway to health and the rest of the body in other medically significant ways. In general and during pregnancy, we're going to take a quick break. When we come back, we'll learn more about that. Don't go anywhere. Welcome back. We're talking to Dr. Bernard Basseri. Okay, very interesting story coming here at age 14 and immediately falling into dental oral health and becoming a ceramist and then eventually a dentist. We were talking before the break about something probably a lot of people don't think about, that when you don't have a smile that you're

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: comfortable with or proud of, it really kind of shatters your whole self-confidence, which can affect your life in many different ways. But also there's a lot of connections between oral health and medical health. Tell me more about that.

DR. BERNARD BASERI: Well, bacteria by itself, it's really harmful and it depends where it's growing. Specifically, in our oral cavity, when we have an extreme load of the bacteria, it not only can affect our gums and our teeth, but also it affects the rest of the body. So it is systemic. So when our mouth is not healthy, when the gums are inflamed, those bacteria, they don't stay in our mouth. They travel throughout our body through the bloodstream. So during pregnancy specifically, hormones are constantly fluctuating, progesterone and estrogen is constantly fluctuating and the gums specifically becomes very sensitive. So as the level of the progesterone starts to fluctuate, the gums become

more permeable and bacteria can really

DR. BERNARD BASERI: get into the bloodstream. And we have found, believe it or not, it's very interesting. Once I got more into this, we have found bacteria in our mouth that can travel to the bloodstream and get into placenta and amniotic fluid. Those bacteria we have found to be similar to the mom's oral cavity. So this is something really alarming and that really took my interest to the next level to really understand how the oral health really affects moms and their fetus, knowing and not knowing. We all think everything needs to be beautiful, but when you go deep down and try to find out, okay, what's going on with certain situations that can present itself such as preterm, such as low birth weight, preeclampsia, these are important

DR. BERNARD BASERI: factors that is completely related to the bacteria and the level of the bacteria that

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: we have in our mouth. I think we have two things in common. First of all, we both have four children and also our wives are both doulas. That's correct. And I think that when you're going through a practice and you have a developing practice and you're at the same time growing a family and your loved one is pregnant and then postpartum and then pregnant and then postpartum again and again, you learn a lot more and you sort of focus a lot more on your modality during that time of life. Just to even take care of our own wives and then you realize how much you could do for other people who are pregnant or postpartum. So it's really interesting the things that you're saying about how the bacteria could

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: not just root in your mouth and more so during pregnancy because of hormonal changes, but then spread to the body for anybody, but during pregnancy even into the amniotic fluid sitting around the baby. That's something I hadn't really thought of before. So with that in mind, if someone's planning to become pregnant, what would they do to prepare for

DR. BERNARD BASERI: the pregnancy? I will tell my patients, obviously before they want to become pregnant, make sure that you have a comprehensive oral evaluation, check the gums, check the teeth. With the help of now digital x-rays that we have, we are able to really scan the entire oral cavity and make sure that there are no pre-existing conditions such as small cavities or any infections. Sometimes these infections or sometimes cavities may not necessarily cause pain, but as the level of the estrogen and the progesterone specifically fluctuating, that is going to trigger the bacteria to really go on a different level and start affecting soft tissues such as gum and our bone and really exceeding the level of the cavities

DR. BERNARD BASERI: to a different level that in a normal setting, it's not the same. So when we look at our pregnant moms, obviously morning sickness is one factor that we have seen. The oral cavity becomes very acidic. That pH level really affects the enamels. The enamels, they become more permeable to the bacteria and causes cavities. So if there's a cavity that's been that hasn't gone diagnosed prior to becoming pregnant, that can really go into the next level and those bacteria, they find themselves really fast going into the nerve and we have all heard the term root canal. Everyone is terrified about it. They say it's painful. Obviously, it is painful if it's not treated, but obviously we want to make sure that our patients

DR. BERNARD BASERI: always screen before they take on this important journey which is pregnancy. So with the help of our digital x-rays, now we have AI in our practice that is going to scan the x-rays. So there are close to 250 shades of grays and our eyes are only trained to peak anywhere between 20 to 50 if you're really good, if you have 20-20 vision. But AI really helps us to see if there has been any cavities that we haven't detected it. So I really take that into great consideration when it comes to the health of my patients. We put the x-rays through the AI. We verify everything and we make sure nothing goes missing. So if somebody knows that they're planning a pregnancy, you would recommend doing that kind of evaluation before they get

DR. BERNARD BASERI: pregnant? Absolutely. Evaluation. Make sure your gums and your teeth are sound. There is no active infection or bacteria or pre-existing conditions, you know, basically there. And highly recommend getting dental cleaning prior to conceiving. Even after you conceive and you know that you're pregnant, we want to make sure that throughout your pregnancy your gums and your teeth are clean. It is completely safe because we want to make sure those bacteria are not getting into your bloodstream and finding themselves in the amniotic fluid and your fetus. So just

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: want to make sure I get that straight because I hear sometimes people are nervous to do dental cleanings during pregnancy. I'm not sure what that's based on but you're saying it's good to do dental cleanings even during the pregnancy, during all stages of pregnancy? Yes,

DR. BERNARD BASERI: according to CDC it's important to make sure that the load of the bacteria is low. So what we want to do is that obviously we don't want to do any elective treatments such as you know veneers or teeth whitening. Anything that we can sort of put away until the pregnancy is complete. We want to do that but during pregnancy we want to make sure that the teeth are clean and we don't want those bacteria to find themselves in the area that we don't want them to be. So for example one specific bacteria that can cause you know cavities we have found specifically in the pregnant women that if the load of that bacteria is high your fetus and eventually your baby can start having cavities at the very stages. This is

DR. BERNARD BASERI: my point when we found out. So crazy they don't even have teeth yet. They don't even have teeth and you know even going further you know we all have you know we have done it you know in the past we try to you know sort of taste the food and give it you know to our baby we put in our mouth we make sure it's not hot and it tastes good we transfer that bacteria from our mouth to our baby. So guess what now we have given our baby a lifetime cavity bacteria. So it's it goes beyond say of really understanding how this works. Everything starts at the very early stages even prior to becoming pregnant you want to make sure that your mouth is clean there is no active infection the gums are not inflamed and really keep that you know throughout

DR. BERNARD BASERI: your pregnancy and even after pregnancy you want to keep that up. So just before we go

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: to break sometimes people listening to this podcast will be pregnant and sometimes they listen to us say oh before you get pregnant it would be great to do x y and z but now it's already too late they're already pregnant. So somebody who's pregnant and listening and didn't know that it would be great to do a full exam and to handle any cavities and bacteria before

pregnancy what's the best thing they can do right now? Well it's not too late anytime

DR. BERNARD BASERI: you can bring the load of the bacteria down it is a plus. So even if you're in your first trimester or even if you're in the second trimester or even the third trimester it's very safe we have created a safe environment for our pregnant patients to really take their oral health to the next level. Sometimes it is hard to have a dental cleaning done in the first trimester because of nausea and vomiting. So what I recommend you know to my patients make sure that you brush and floss daily if it's too hard for you to use an adult size toothbrush just use kid size toothbrush put a piece of you know pea size toothpaste on the toothbrush and then gently you know clean your teeth obviously you want

DR. BERNARD BASERI: to save it from your gums rinse your mouth and really keep the bacteria at a low level. During morning time obviously when there's acid reflux you want to avoid brushing your teeth right away you want to rinse your mouth sometimes you know baking soda helps to stabilize the pH of the mouth 30 minutes later you can go ahead it is safe to brush your teeth and the reason behind that is if there was an acid reflux in the mouth we want to avoid brushing right away because you're going to abrate the enamels the enamels have been sitting environment for a little bit so when you're brushing you can actually take away your enamel and you can actually introduce those bacteria to penetrate deep inside the

DR. BERNARD BASERI: enamel so some hygiene you know oral health care is is still you know better than nothing you still can have a healthy gums if you take this into consideration obviously second trimester is easier for many trimesters it's kind of hard because you could deal with heavy laying back is difficult although we have committed our patients to adjust you know the dental chair to their comfort level we have you know pillows and blankets and you know all the amenities necessary to help our pregnant patients be comfortable during the bell settings

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: sounds great let's take a quick break and when we come back we have one more segment we'll talk about some common conditions that come up during pregnancy we'll be right back welcome back we're talking to dr bernard vaseri and i think you've given some really helpful information and things that people can do before pregnancy knowing that they're planning a pregnancy in terms of their oral health and also for the various stages of pregnancy but there are certain conditions that come up specifically during pregnancy one of them is

DR. BERNARD BASERI: pregnancy gingivitis what is that all right so pregnancy gingivitis is a very well known term for those that they read on you know certain things that can happen during pregnancy that's typically when the gums starts bleeding more right so if your gum starts bleeding more during pregnancy that's a term that we use as a pregnancy gingivitis and that actually has to do with the hormones that we talked about the estrogen and the progesterone that's constantly fluctuating so if there are bacteria plaque build up sitting around the gum lines under the gum lines around the teeth those bacteria are very much easy to permeate through the blood vessels and the capillaries and really cause bleeding so you may find yourself that when

DR. BERNARD BASERI: you're flossing or brushing your gums are typically bleeding more than usual nothing to really be worried about what you want to do is to make sure that after your meal you floss and you brush i know it's kind of challenging you know to do that after every meal but really once

or twice a day at the minimum is really going to help to keep the load of the bacteria at low level specifically you don't want to have plaque build up on your gums many times you know around 55 to 70 percent of the pregnant patients they find themselves you know having inflamed and pregnancy gingivitis you may also find some overgrown gums in front of your teeth this is normal nothing to really be worried about really normal cleaning can help

DR. BERNARD BASERI: to bring down the load of the bacteria and the inflammation down and obviously that's going to help your baby not to have those bacteria that is going to affect their life so this is sort of very important to make sure that you don't stress too much make sure that you are really having your gums and your teeth clean during the pregnancy brush at least you know a few times and that's going to help to bring the load of the bacteria and inflammation

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: at its minimum level okay so i hear all the time patients tell me my gums bleed during pregnancy more than usual or sometimes they just never have bleeding gums and all of a sudden they do during pregnancy so are you saying that's not something to worry about just to brush more or is that something that needs to be evaluated well obviously if the

DR. BERNARD BASERI: mouth has been cleaned up prior to pregnancy the bacteria and the plaque is at minimum level but during the pregnancy it's also important to keep that oral hygiene up so visiting your dentist making sure you're getting the cleaning done at least once or twice during the pregnancy is an important factor not to let the bacteria build up because once you start seeing more than normal then that's going to be a problem so you want to keep the bleeding at its low level it is normal to have bleeding gums during pregnancy but not really excessively so if you're brushing with it and you find your mouth full of blood that's going to be alarming there may have been you know area that the gum is infected or there is food that has

DR. BERNARD BASERI: aggregated in that area you want to make sure that your gums and your teeth stays clean but if you see more than normal your gums are bleeding definitely contact your dentist have them take a look at it it is safe in certain situations to even take dental x-rays we basically double shield our patients with apron lead making sure that they're completely safe but if it's necessary to go in that route yes it is important to contact your dentist and have

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: them take a look at your gum so just a little blood when i spit out that's nothing to panic about but if there's a significant amount of blood important to get that checked out absolutely yes what about infections or oral dental infections more common during pregnancy

DR. BERNARD BASERI: absolutely our mouth specifically our teeth are very much prone to developing infection not necessarily can sometimes it can hurt sometimes it could be not really painful but it is very common for our environment specifically when it comes you know to our gums to develop infection and why do i say that because the blood supply in our mouth basically are very prone to get infected by the bacteria that is sitting around the gums the estrogen and progesterone specifically makes the capillaries very much permeable so as soon as there is bacteria present those bacteria they want to find themselves and get into the bloodstream they can find themselves not only the bloodstream but it can penetrate

DR. BERNARD BASERI: right under the gum line get into the nervous system of the tooth and in some cases causes an infection of the nervous system of the tooth something that we all familiar with caused

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: root canal treatment root canal the dreaded root canal okay so a couple of things the capillaries the smallest of the blood vessels they become more permeable during pregnancy so bacteria have an easier time getting in and then traveling through the bloodstream creating problems creating infections and you said you don't always feel pain with an infection what would the other

DR. BERNARD BASERI: signs be well the other side is would be you may have some excessive swelling you can have sort of you know bone loss you can develop bone loss during pregnancy and you may actually be prone more to cavities like i said the ph of the mouth drops to as low as two that's a great environment for the bacteria to penetrate inside the teeth and causes a cavity that by itself can also cause deep decay and eventually causing root canal treatment in some cases you may find your teeth a little bit loose that's not necessarily very alarming but if you have a good oral hygiene if you're flossing if you're trying to make sure you're not leaving any food on a plaque build up between your teeth that is going to help you to really go through the

DR. BERNARD BASERI: pregnancy without any issues but if you start having severe pain if you start having throbbing pain definitely contact your dentist have them take a look because it is important not to neglect your teeth and the oral cavities as we know that's directly correlated to the health of

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: your fetus my listeners know i was recently in the icu in the cardiac care unit and one thing my doctor said to me he goes well at least you have good oral health and he implied that there's a connection between poor oral health and heart conditions can you tell me more about that

DR. BERNARD BASERI: absolutely so we talked a lot about bacteria that are sitting in our mouth and we said that this bacteria they just don't stay in our mouth it basically travels to our body so once they get into the bloodstream the bacteria with the blood starts traveling obviously they find themselves in the heart and the heart starts pumping this blood that is infected with this bacteria from your brain to your toe so you may not find yourself having pain but these bacteria are constantly getting all over the place so we want to make sure that we keep the mouth clean it can cause cardiovascular disease it can cause Alzheimer's it can cause you know really infecting the heart valves of the heart that's also very important you know to make sure we

DR. BERNARD BASERI: really keep our mouth clean not only that also kissing when we kiss in our partners right or we kiss our baby we can transfer those bacteria to our partners to our babies that's also important you know to really keep in mind to make sure you visit your dentist at least twice a year to not only keep yourself healthy but also your partner as well that's good advice and

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: then as you said during pregnancy it can travel to all parts of the pregnant body including into the amniotic fluid surrounding the baby so the take-home message is if you know you're going to be getting pregnant go ahead and take care of your oral health beforehand if not it's

not too late to get cleanings during the pregnancy at any trimester and then again after the baby comes is a great time to see the dentist make sure you keep bacterial load low and keep yourself healthy and not spread unfriendly bacteria to your baby and your loved ones dr baseri thank you so much for sharing this really important information with us

DR. BERNARD BASERI: where can we find you online it's very simple you can find me on instagram at dr baseri dr dot baseri you can go on our website smile recreation dot com or if you come to visit dr berlin i'm next to dr berlin literally right next door so you cannot miss it you have no excuse easily open our door we welcome you and we look forward to helping moms not only go through the pregnancy with ease but also making sure your baby is safe as well as a mom with a

DR. ELLIOT BERLIN, DC: great smile yes thank you again at home thanks for listening to the informed pregnancy podcast for more pregnancy and parenting information just like this visit us online at informedpregnancy.com

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