Oral bacteria linked to stillbirth

By Case Western Reserve University School of Dental Medicine

CLEVELAND, OH, USA: Researchers at the Department of Periodontics at Case Western Reserve University School of Dental Medicine reported the first documented link between a mother with pregnancy associated gum disease and the death of her fetus. The study findings will be discussed in the February issue of Obstetrics & Gynecology.

Approximately 75 per cent of pregnant women experience gum bleeding due to the hormonal changes during pregnancy. “There is an old wives’ tale that you lose a tooth for each baby, and this is due to the underlying changes during pregnancy,” said Yiping Han, lead researcher of the study. “But if there is another underlying condition in the background, then you may lose more than a tooth but a baby.”

Due to pregnancy-associated gingivitis, Fusobacterium nucleatum, a bacteria commonly found in the mouth, entered the blood and worked its way to the placenta. Han was able to match the bacterium found in the mother’s mouth with the bacterium in the baby’s infected lungs and stomach.

Normally a mother’s immune system takes care of the bacteria in the blood before it reaches the placenta. In this case, the mother had experienced an upper respiratory infection and a low-grade fever just a few days before the stillbirth. The baby died from a septic infection and inflammation caused by the bacteria.

The study underlines the growing importance of good oral health care. In addition to this direct link from the mother to her baby, oral bacteria have been associated with heart disease, diabetes and arthritis.

(Museum dispels myth about George Washington’s teeth)

George Washington’s teeth are on display at the National Museum of Dentistry in Baltimore. (DTI/Photo Fred Michmershuizen)

Fred Michmershuizen

DTI

Baltimore, MD, USA: Did you know that George Washington’s false teeth were not really made of wood? Those who visit the National Museum of Dentistry, located here, can see first president’s famous chopsticks on display, & they can find out more about his tooth troubles. The story about wooden teeth is a myth.

“Many people are surprised to find out that George Washington never had wooden dentures,” said Museum Curator Dr. Scott Swank, in a recent press release. “We think the myth arose since ivory dentures tend to stain like wood after years of eating and drinking.”

The National Museum of Dentistry features a gallery devoted to the first president and his tooth troubles. His dentures — which were actually made of ivory — are on display, as well as forceps made to pull his teeth on the Revolutionary War battlefield and examples of presidential portraits that show how tooth loss affected Washington’s appearance.

According to the museum, Washington lost his first tooth when he was 22 years old. Despite the fact that he brushed with tooth powder daily, he would have only one tooth in his mouth by the time he was inaugurated president in 1789. Washington had many illnesses during his life, including smallpox and malaria. Treatments included remedies like mercurous chloride, which is known to destroy the teeth.

His favorite dentist, John Greenwood, would make several sets of dentures for Washington during his lifetime — and none of them would be made from wood, according to the museum. In fact, they were carved from hippopotamus ivory and elephant ivory. Some of the dentures were set in gold and held in place with springs that held the upper and lower teeth together.