

Mom's emotional health, education level linked to teen oral health

22 August 2012, by Susan Griffith

(Medical Xpress) -- A mother's emotional health and education level during her child's earliest years influence oral health at age 14, according to a new study from Case Western Reserve University's School of Dental Medicine.

Researchers started with the oral health of the teens and worked backwards to age 3 to find out what factors in their past influenced their oral health outcomes. While [mothers](#) were interviewed, lead investigator Suchitra Nelson, professor in the dental school, believes it can apply to whoever is the child's primary caregiver.

Nelson's team examined the teeth of 224 adolescent participants in a longitudinal study that followed very [low birth weight](#) and normal birth weight children. Over the years, researchers gathered health and medical information from the children and their mothers to assess the child's wellbeing at age 3, 8 and now 14. The researchers analyzed the teen's oral health by counting the number of decayed, filled or missing permanent teeth and assessed the level of [dental plaque](#), a symptom for poor oral hygiene.

Mothers completed a questionnaire about preventative treatments from sealants to mouthwashes, sugary juice or soft drink consumption and access to dental care and frequency of dental visits.

The data revealed that even with access to dental insurance, fluoride treatments and sealants as young children, it did not always prevent cavities by the age of 14, said Nelson, professor of community dentistry at Case Western Reserve dental school.

She is lead investigator on the [Journal of Dental Research](#) article, "Early Maternal [Psychosocial Factors](#) are Predictors for Adolescent Caries."

What did prevent cavities in teens?

Using a statistical modeling program that tracked pathways from the teen's dental assessments back to the source of where the oral health originated led researchers right to mothers and their overall emotional health, [education level](#) and knowledge when children were at ages 3 and 8.

The researchers found if mothers struggled in any of the three areas, the oral health of the teens at age 14 resulted in higher numbers of oral health problems.

"We can't ignore the environments of these children," Nelson said. "It isn't enough to tell children to brush and floss, they need more—and particularly from their caregivers."

The [oral health](#) boost comes from mothers, who muster coping skills to handle everyday stresses and develop social networks to provide for their children's needs.

It was found that mothers with more education beyond high school, with healthy emotional states and knowledge about eating right had children with healthier teeth.

"We cannot ignore these environmental influences and need interventions to help some moms get on track early in their children's lives," Nelson concludes.

Nelson says moms need to care for themselves to help their children. She likens it to the emergency instructions on an airplane that mothers put on the mask first and then their [children](#). "How can a mother help her child if she passes out," asks Nelson. "It's all common sense, but some mothers may need help."

Provided by Case Western Reserve University

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