

Women's oral health: a lifelong priority

Vienna, 23 October 2024 – Women's oral health is about more than just a beautiful smile—it's a critical aspect of overall wellbeing that is often overlooked. From puberty to menopause, and every stage in between, hormonal changes can significantly impact oral health, affecting everything from gum disease risk to overall systemic health. Despite its importance, women's oral health remains under-discussed and insufficiently researched, even though it plays a vital role in conditions like pregnancy complications and chronic illnesses.

Exploring the link between women's oral and general health

Professor Lior Shapira, scientific chair of *EuroPerio11*, the world's leading congress in periodontology and implant dentistry that will take place in May 2025, emphasises the importance of this conversation: "Women's health has unique considerations that are often overlooked in discussions about general health, including oral health. Hormonal changes throughout a woman's life—from puberty to menopause—can significantly impact oral tissues. For example, fluctuations in oestrogen and progesterone can increase a woman's susceptibility to gum disease or exacerbate pre-existing conditions. The *EuroPerio 11* scientific committee recognised the need to shed light on these gender-specific factors, emphasising how oral health care for women requires tailored approaches at different life stages. A dedicated session titled "*Women's oral health – time to explore*," will raise awareness and encourage oral health professionals to adopt a more personalised, holistic approach when treating female patients."

Shapira explains that, while many oral health professionals may be aware of the basics, there's still a gap in understanding the full extent of how hormonal changes during women's lives can influence oral health: "Few professionals are trained to recognise and treat the periodontal implications of pregnancy or menopause. The intricacies of how these life stages impact oral tissues are not always covered in standard undergraduate and post-graduate dental education, so this area requires more focused research, training and awareness."

Understanding women's oral health through life stages

Oral health impacts the overall health of women, particularly during key life stages such as pregnancy and menopause. Hormonal changes influence gum health, increasing the risk of inflammation and gum disease, which in turn can have broader health implications, including potential risks during pregnancy. Periodontitis often begins in older adults, coinciding with menopause, reflecting how hormonal changes during this time affect oral health.

Dr Purnima Kumar, one of the EuroPerio11 moderator and a renowned expert from the United States, highlights the need for more research and greater awareness: "We are learning more about women's health all the time. For example, we are discovering how a mother's health can affect her baby's future oral health. Untreated gum disease during pregnancy can have serious consequences, not only for the

mother but also for the child. By properly treating one generation, we are impacting the following one. The session at *EuroPerio11* offers a unique opportunity to explore these critical issues.”

Dr Kumar explains that for years women have been excluded from research, no specific studies were aimed at understanding the unique needs of women, so there is a lack of data and gaps that need to be filled. “Women go through specific hormonal changes during menstruation, reproduction, pregnancy, lactation, IVF, menopause and hormone replacement. We hope this session will shine a light on the specific needs of women’s oral health and encourage oral health professionals to investigate and take these differences into account while treating women.”

“Down the line, with more data, we will probably need dedicated guidelines and better treatment algorithms for women. In the era of personalised medicine, it is important to begin by considering that women need special care at different stages of their lives. We need to take women’s oral health seriously and this session is a good start.”

Promoting collaboration between healthcare professionals

Prof Shapira concludes: “The key messages are that, for men and women, oral health is not isolated from the rest of the body, and secondly, that we need to move away from a one-size-fits-all approach in dentistry. Health professionals should adjust their treatment strategies accordingly. Awareness is crucial: proactive oral health is needed at all life stages. Women in particular should be empowered with knowledge about how their oral health may change over time and what they can do to maintain it.”

The interconnected nature of oral and systemic health calls for a stronger collaboration between dental professionals and other healthcare providers. By addressing the oral health needs of women, healthcare professionals can play a crucial role in promoting overall wellbeing. Tailored oral health advice, timely dental care, and effective communication between gynaecologists, GPs, dentists, and patients are essential in fostering healthier outcomes for women.

Join us at EuroPerio11 to learn more

More information on this vital subject will be presented at *EuroPerio11*, the world’s leading congress in periodontology and implant dentistry, taking place in Vienna, from 14 to 17 May 2025 at the Messe Wien Exhibition & Congress Centre.

A dedicated session titled “*Women’s oral health – time to explore,*” will focus on the often-overlooked or misunderstood topic. The session, scheduled for 15 May 2025 at 16:30, will explore the unique relationship between women’s general health and oral health throughout the different stages of life.

The *EuroPerio11* session chaired by Dr Kumar will feature a range of expert speakers, including Dr Orly Nir Shapira on menopause and oral health, Dr Nagihan Bostanci on pregnancy’s effect on the oral microbiome, and Dr Egija Zaura on the development of women’s health and the microbiome.

EuroPerio11 invites all healthcare professionals and media to join this essential session on women’s oral health. This is an opportunity to learn from leading experts, engage in discussions, and understand how oral health intersects with overall health at every stage of a woman’s life.

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Notes to editors

For more information please contact: press@efp.org

Media registration for EuroPerio11: <https://www.efp.org/press-media/register/>

EuroPerio11 session promotional video *Women's Oral Health – Time to Explore*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jfyvqLJZr0k>

EFP podcast episode *The X Factor: What is unique about women's health*: <https://www.efp.org/efp-virtual/perio-talks-podcasts/the-x-factor-what-is-unique-about-womens-oral-health/>

EFP video on oral health during pregnancy: <https://www.efp.org/for-patients/gum-disease-general-health/oral-health-pregnancy/>

References

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<https://nwhn.org/oral-health-is-a-womens-health-issue/>

About EuroPerio11

EuroPerio11 is the premier global congress in periodontology and implant dentistry, bringing together leading experts, researchers, and practitioners to explore the latest advancements in the field. The congress is organized by the European Federation of Periodontology (EFP) and will take place in Vienna from 14 to 17 May 2025.

About the European Federation of Periodontology

The EFP is a global non-profit organisation with a European core, that promotes periodontal science and awareness of gum health among oral health professionals, other medical professionals, policy makers and the public. Founded in 1991, the EFP brings together 43 national societies, representing more than 18,000 oral health professionals and researchers from six continents. The EFP's vision is: "Periodontal health for a better life."