

H5-3 ABCs for a Healthy Pregnancy

- A** Avoid exposure to toxic substances and chemicals—such as cleaning solvents, lead and mercury, some insecticides, and paint. Pregnant women should avoid exposure to paint fumes.
- B** Be sure to see your doctor and get prenatal care as soon as you think you're pregnant. It's important to see your doctor regularly throughout pregnancy, so be sure to keep all your prenatal care appointments. *and . . .*
Breastfeeding is the healthiest choice for both you and your baby. Talk to your doctor, your family and friends, and your employer about how you choose to feed your baby and how they can support you in your decision.
- C** Cigarette smoking during pregnancy can result in low birth weight babies. It has been associated with infertility, miscarriages, tubal pregnancies, infant mortality and childhood morbidity. Additionally, cigarette smoking may cause long-term learning disabilities. If you smoke, you should try to quit. Secondary smoke may also harm a mother and her developing baby. It is a good idea to ask people to stop smoking around you during your pregnancy and after the baby is born.
- D** Drink extra fluids (water is best) throughout pregnancy to help your body keep up with the increases in your blood volume. Drink at least 6 to 8 glasses of water, fruit juice, or milk each day. A good way to know you're drinking enough fluid is when your urine looks like almost-clear water or is very light yellow.
- E** Eat healthy to get the nutrients you and your unborn baby need. Your meals should include adequate servings from the five basic food groups. Foods low in fat and high in fiber are important to a healthy diet.
- F** Take 400 micrograms of folic acid **daily both before pregnancy and during the first few months of pregnancy** to reduce the risk of birth defects of the brain and spine. All women who could possibly become pregnant should take a vitamin with folic acid, every day. It is also important to eat a healthy diet with fortified foods (enriched grain products, including cereals, rice, breads, and pastas) and foods with natural sources of folate (orange juice, green leafy vegetables, beans, peanuts, broccoli, asparagus, peas, and lentils).
- G** Genetic testing should be done appropriately. It's important to know your family history. If there have been problems with pregnancies or birth defects in your family, report these to your doctor. Also, genetic counselors can talk with you about the information you might need in making decisions about having a family. You can call a major medical center in your area for help in finding a board-certified genetic counselor.
- H** Hand-washing is important throughout the day, especially after handling raw meat or using the bathroom. This can help prevent the spread of many bacteria and viruses that cause infection.
- I** Take 30 milligrams of iron during your pregnancy as prescribed by your doctor to reduce the risk of anemia later in pregnancy. All women of childbearing age should eat a diet rich in iron.
- J** Join a support group for moms to be, or join a class on parenting or childbirth.
- K** Know your limits. Let your physician know if you experience any of the following: pain of any kind, strong cramps, uterine contractions at 20-minute intervals, vaginal bleeding, leaking of amniotic fluid, dizziness, fainting, shortness of breath, palpitations, tachycardia (rapid beating of the heart), constant nausea and vomiting, trouble walking, edema (swelling of joints), or if your baby has decreased activity.
- L** Legal drugs such as alcohol and caffeine are important issues for pregnant women. There is no safe amount of alcohol a woman can drink while pregnant. Fetal alcohol syndrome, a disorder characterized by growth retardation, facial abnormalities, and central nervous system dysfunction, is caused by a woman's use of alcohol during pregnancy. Caffeine, found in tea, coffee, soft drinks and chocolate, should also be limited. Be sure to read labels when trying to cut down on caffeine during pregnancy. More than 200 foods, beverages, and over-the-counter medications contain caffeine!
- M** Medical conditions/complications such as diabetes, epilepsy, and high blood pressure should be treated and kept under control. Ask your doctor about any medications that may need to be changed or adjusted during pregnancy. If you are currently taking any medications ask your doctor if it is safe to take them while you're pregnant. Also, be sure to discuss any herbs or vitamins you are taking. They are medicines, too! Discuss with your doctor **all** medications, prescribed and over-the-counter, that you are taking.

H5-3 (continued)

N Never be afraid to ask your doctor or health care provider questions about your health. It is better to take all precautions and discuss any questions or concerns you may have.

O Over-the-counter cough and cold remedies may contain alcohol or other ingredients that should be avoided during pregnancy. Ask your health care provider about prescription or over-the-counter drugs that you are taking or may consider taking while pregnant.

P Physical activity during pregnancy can benefit both you and your baby by lessening discomfort and fatigue, providing a sense of well-being, and increasing the likelihood of early recovery after delivery. Light to moderate exercise during pregnancy strengthens the abdominal and back muscles, which help to improve posture. Practicing yoga, walking, swimming, and cycling on a stationary bicycle are usually safe exercises for pregnant women. But always check with your doctor before beginning any kind of exercise, especially during pregnancy.

Q Queasiness, stomach upset and morning sickness are common during pregnancy. Foods that you normally love may make you feel sick to your stomach. You may need to substitute other nutritious foods. Eating five or six small meals a day instead of three large ones may make you feel better.

R Read about and make plans to baby-proof your home. These are important tips for making your home a safer environment for your baby.

S Saunas, hot tubs, and steam rooms should be avoided while you are pregnant. Excessive high heat may be harmful during your pregnancy.

T Toxoplasmosis is an infection caused by a parasite that can seriously harm an unborn baby. Avoid eating undercooked meat and handling cat litter, and be sure to wear gloves when gardening.

U Uterus size increases during the first trimester, which, along with more efficient functioning of your kidneys, may cause you to feel the need to urinate more often. You may also leak urine when sneezing, coughing or laughing. This is due to the growing uterus pressing against your bladder, which lies directly in front of and slightly under the uterus during the first few months of pregnancy. If you experience burning along with frequency of urination, be sure to tell your doctor.

V Vaccinations are an important concern for pregnant women. Get needed vaccines before pregnancy. CDC has clear guidelines for the use of vaccines during pregnancy. Review the list and be sure to discuss with your doctor.

W Being overweight or underweight during pregnancy may cause problems. Try to get within 15 pounds of your ideal weight before pregnancy. Remember, pregnancy is not a time to be dieting! Don't stop eating or start skipping meals as your weight increases. Both you and your baby need the calories and nutrition you receive from a healthy diet. Be sure to consult with your doctor about your diet.

X Avoid X rays. If you must have dental work or diagnostic tests, tell your dentist or physician that you are pregnant so that extra care can be taken.

Y Your baby loves you, and you should show your baby that you love her, too. Give your baby a healthy environment to live in while you are pregnant. Infants and children require constant care and guidance. Their health and safety should be carefully watched at all times. Refer to the link above for tips on safe and healthy child care.

Z Get your ZZZZZZZZZs . . . Be sure to get plenty of rest . . . Resting on your side as often as possible, especially on your left side is advised, as it provides the best circulation to your baby and helps reduce swelling.

Disclaimer: Please consult your doctor on any and all issues regarding your pregnancy. Although these may be good general pregnancy tips, every pregnancy is different, and each deserves the attention of a doctor or health care provider.

SOURCE: National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities. 2005. *ABCs . . . Pregnancy Tips A-Z* (<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/bd/abc.htm>; retrieved May 30, 2005).