

What Steps Can Women Take For Healthier Babies?

Not all birth defects can be prevented. But a woman can increase her own chance of having a healthy baby. Many birth defects happen very early in pregnancy, sometimes before a woman even knows she is pregnant. Remember that about half of all pregnancies are unplanned. Therefore, every woman should:

- ◆ Take a multivitamin that has folic acid in it every day.
- ◆ Have regular medical check-ups.
- ◆ Talk to her health care provider about any medical problems and medicine use (both over-the-counter and prescription).
- ◆ Ask about avoiding any substances at work or at home that might be harmful to a developing baby.
- ◆ Eat a healthy, balanced diet.
- ◆ Avoid eating raw or undercooked meat.
- ◆ Avoid alcohol, tobacco, and street drugs.

While Pregnant:

- ◆ Keep up these healthy habits.
- ◆ Get early prenatal care and go to every appointment.

Want to Know More?

Ask your health care provider or local health department how to plan for a healthy baby.

Visit the Pregnancy and Newborn Health Education Center at <http://marchofdimes.com> or e-mail askus@marchofdimes.com

Call the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) at **1-888-232-5929** (toll-free), e-mail flo@cdc.gov, or visit <http://www.cdc.gov/folicacid>.

Call the Birth Defects Registry or Genetics Program at your state health department.



The National Birth Defects Prevention Network (NBDPN) is a national network of birth defects programs and individuals working at local, state, and national levels in birth defects surveillance, research, and prevention.

www.nbdpn.org



Important information about...

Preventing Birth Defects



*The best possible quality of health
in every stage of life*

What are Birth Defects?

Birth defects are abnormal conditions that happen before or at the time of birth. Some are mild—like an extra finger or toe. Some are very serious—like a heart defect. They can cause

physical, mental, or medical problems. Some, like Down syndrome or sickle cell anemia, are caused by genetic factors.

Others are caused by certain drugs, medicines or chemicals.

But the causes of most birth defects are still a mystery. Researchers are working hard to learn the causes of birth defects so that we can find ways to prevent them.



Did You Know?

- ◆ Birth defects are the leading cause of death in children less than one year of age—causing one in every five deaths.
- ◆ 18 babies die each day in the U.S. as the result of a birth defect.
- ◆ Defects of the heart and limbs are the most common kinds of birth defects.
- ◆ Millions of dollars are spent every year for the care and treatment of children with birth defects.

How Serious are Birth Defects?

Birth defects are a serious problem. One in 33 babies is born with a birth defect. Many people believe that birth defects only happen to other people. Birth defects can and do happen in any family. About 120,000 babies in the U.S. each year have birth defects.



What is the Good News?

The good news is that new ways of preventing and treating birth defects are being found. Genes that may cause birth defects are being found every day, providing hope for new treatments and cures. Genetic counseling can provide parents with information about their risks based on family history, age, ethnic or racial background, or other factors.

Better health care for mothers with problems like diabetes or seizures can improve their chances of having healthy babies. Immunization prevents infections like German measles (rubella) that can harm unborn babies.

Did You Know?

All women who could get pregnant should get 400 micrograms (400 mcg or 0.4 mg) of folic acid every day to help prevent some types of serious birth defects. Folic acid is a B-vitamin that can reduce the risk of birth defects of the brain and spine.

Today, babies born with birth defects can live longer and healthier lives. Special care after birth and newborn screening tests can help these babies.

Many states keep track of how often and where birth defects happen. Your state may be able to tell you about birth defects and services that may help you or someone you know.

