

Tip 2: Book a visit with your healthcare provider.

Thinking about pregnancy? Be sure to talk to your healthcare provider about these topics at your next visit!



✓ **All medications you are currently taking, including vitamins and/or herbal and homeopathic supplements**

Many individuals need to take [medicine](#) to stay healthy, and there are often benefits to continuing your treatment throughout your [pregnancy](#). If you are trying to have a baby or are just thinking about it, now is a great time to start getting ready for pregnancy by talking with your doctor about medications you may be taking. This can give you time to consider all options that can help keep you and your developing baby as healthy as possible.

✓ **Family medical history**

Along with your existing medications and treatments, it is important to consider the health conditions on both sides of the family. Based on your [family history](#), your doctor might alter your care or refer you for genetic or nutritional counseling.

✓ **Regular prenatal care**

Those who are already pregnant or think that they could be pregnant should see their healthcare providers as soon as possible. The earlier and more consistently you see your healthcare provider, the more opportunities there are to monitor your development and address any questions that might arise along the way. So be sure to keep all [prenatal care](#) appointments.

✓ **Mental Health**

Individuals with children or those that are expecting deserve the best - including the very best mental health. [Depression](#) during and after pregnancy is common and treatable. If you think you have depression, seek treatment from your health care provider as soon as possible. Depression causes enormous suffering and disability and reduces your response to your child's needs. [Evidence](#) indicates that treating the depression of individuals expecting a baby leads to improved growth and development of the newborn and reduces the likelihood of diarrhea and malnutrition among them.

✓ **Accessibility to resources including WIC (Women, Infants, and Children), food stamps, Medicaid, etc.**

If you and your family need [additional support](#), ask your doctor about how these and other resources may help. Please refer to the Tip 2 resources that are marked on our resources map as a potential starting point if you still aren't sure where to begin.

Social Media:

Visiting your healthcare provider before & during pregnancy is key, especially if stopping or starting any medication. Have questions about medication during pregnancy? Visit <http://bit.ly/Best4UBaby> for access to expert information. #HealthyCommunitiesHealthyBabies #NBDAM

Tip 3: Become up-to-date with vaccines.

If you are pregnant or planning a pregnancy, the specific [vaccines](#) you need are determined by your age, lifestyle, medical conditions, travel, and previous vaccinations. Talk with your healthcare provider about getting up to date on all your vaccines. [CDC](#) recommends that pregnant women get two vaccines **during** every pregnancy: the inactivated flu vaccine (the injection, not the live nasal spray flu vaccine) and the Tdap vaccine. Vaccines help protect you and your baby. Having the right vaccinations at the right time can help keep you and your baby healthy.



Flu: Getting a flu shot is the first and most important step in protecting against flu. The flu shot given during pregnancy has been shown to protect both mom and baby (for up to 6 months after delivery) and reduces associated flu symptoms like a fever – which may be associated with neural tube defects and other adverse outcomes for a developing baby.

Tdap: You should get the Tdap vaccine near the end of each pregnancy (weeks 27 – 36). After getting the shot, your body will make protective antibodies that will pass to your baby before birth and provide some short-term protection against whooping cough. Anyone helping to take care of a new baby should also receive the Tdap vaccine before the baby is born. Vaccination of pregnant women with Tdap is especially important to help protect babies.

Pregnant people are more likely to get severely ill with COVID-19 compared with non-pregnant people. **If you are pregnant, you can receive a [COVID-19 vaccine](#).** Getting a COVID-19 vaccine during pregnancy can protect you from severe illness from COVID-19. If you have questions about getting vaccinated, a conversation with your healthcare provider might help, but is not required for vaccination.

Getting vaccinated is easy and vaccines are available at the doctor's office and many pharmacies and most are covered by insurance. Did you know that most health insurance plans cover recommended vaccines for both children and adults at little or no cost to you? And even if you don't have health insurance, you can still get vaccinated and you may be able to do it for free or at low cost.

Federally funded health centers provide preventive services and wellness care, including vaccines — and may offer sliding fees based on your income. Find a [health center](#) near you. Your state health department can also tell you where to go for free and low-cost vaccines, including community centers, schools, and religious centers. Please refer to our Tip Resources Map for you state.

Social Media:

Not all birth defects can be prevented. But you can increase your chances of having a healthy baby by being your healthiest self both before & during pregnancy. Vaccines help protect you & your developing baby against serious diseases. #HealthyCommunitiesHealthyBabies #NBDAM

Tip 4: Care for your body and mind before and during pregnancy to set you and your baby up for success.

Honoring and listening to your body by [choosing nourishing foods](#) that you enjoy, [moving your body](#) in ways that give you energy, and [managing your stress](#) are great habits to build at any stage in your life. Continuing these habits throughout pregnancy will require some adjustments at various stages, but [whatever your body size or shape, work with your healthcare provider to plan for a healthy pregnancy](#).



Although Body Mass Index (BMI) is not a perfect measure of healthy weight, we do know that a [higher BMI at the start of a pregnancy](#) is associated with a higher risk for certain health problems, including serious birth defects. Talk to your healthcare provider to set an action plan for a healthy pregnancy.

Managing your stress can help you achieve and maintain a healthy body. Stress may increase your risk of gestational diabetes and preterm labor. It can also lead to high blood pressure during pregnancy and preeclampsia. Additionally, stress can make it very difficult to make healthy decisions, like avoiding harmful substances. Talk to your provider about ways to manage your stress and reach out to people you trust to ask for help.

Not everyone has [access to healthy foods](#) and [safe places for physical activity](#). Get involved in your community to make sure your friends and neighbors are well supported and have options to make healthy choices during pregnancy.

Social Media:

Prepping for #pregnancy? Work with your healthcare provider now to plan for healthy habits and practices that benefit your body and mind before and throughout pregnancy.

#HealthyCommunitiesHealthyBabies #NBDAM

Healthy communities lead to healthy pregnancies! Get involved with your city to make sure everyone has access to nutritious food, safe places to live and be active, and participate in social activities that lift up your community. We can all work together to support healthy pregnancies!

#HealthyCommunitiesHealthyBabies #NBDAM

Tip 5: Boost your health by avoiding harmful substances during pregnancy, such as alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.

What is healthy for you is healthy for your baby. Substance use ([alcohol](#), drugs, [cigarettes](#), [marijuana](#), etc.) and/or substance misuse (taking medications differently than prescribed) can be harmful to a pregnancy and infants who are breastfeeding.* The best way to keep yourself, your pregnancy, and your baby healthy is to avoid substance use and to take prescription and over the counter medications only as directed while trying to get pregnant, throughout pregnancy, and while breastfeeding. If you are already pregnant, it is not too late to get help. The earlier you can stop or cut back, the better.



It is important to discuss all medication and substance use with your healthcare providers. Sometimes it can feel too hard to stop using or misusing substances. At other times, abruptly stopping substances might cause withdrawal symptoms. You do not need to go through this process alone. There are health professionals who can provide medical help, guidance and support. One such resource is The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). They run a free and confidential National Helpline, that is available around the clock (in English and Spanish) for individuals and families facing mental and/or substance use disorders. You can also visit their [website](#) for information and resources.

For additional local resources, please refer to your state/county health resources or help us fill in our Tip Resources Map. *If you would like more information on substance use and adverse pregnancy and birth outcomes, please refer to the table below.

How can substance use disorder affect my pregnancy?	
Below is a list of potential complications that can happen if there is a substance use / misuse disorder. There is no known safe 'level' or amounts for use in a pregnancy. However, there are also reports of babies who are born without serious health problems. You can help to improve outcomes just by talking to your healthcare providers about your exposures.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Infertility• Miscarriage• Birth defects• Poor growth• Preterm delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Low birth weight• Stillbirth• SIDS• Withdrawal symptoms / neonatal abstinence syndrome• Learning problems / developmental delay
Talk with a healthcare provider and MotherToBaby to learn more about your specific exposures.	

Social Media:

What is healthy for you is also healthy for your baby. Reduce or eliminate the use of harmful substances during pregnancy (including #alcohol & #tobacco) to minimize harmful effects on your baby. #HealthyCommunitiesHealthyBabies #NBDAM

Proclamation

January is National
Birth Defects
Awareness Month!

National Birth Defects Awareness Month, January 2022

Whereas, birth defects are common, costly, and critical;

Whereas, birth defects affect an estimated **[enter number here]** infants in **[enter your state here]** each year;

Whereas, birth defects are a leading cause of death in the first year of life, associated with one in **[enter number here]** infant deaths in **[enter your state here]**;

Whereas, birth defects can occur in any family regardless of race, ethnicity, health history, or economic status;

Whereas, affordable, accessible, and culturally responsive healthcare is needed to address unmet health needs, delays in receiving appropriate care, and inability to get preventive services;

Whereas, access to care varies on the basis of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, age, sex, disability status, sexual orientation, gender identity, and residential location;

Whereas, absence of health insurance coverage increases the likelihood individuals will have poor health status, be diagnosed with a condition later, and die prematurely;

Whereas, access to regular preconception and prenatal care addresses steps which can reduce the chance that a child will be born with a birth defect, such as taking a daily vitamin with folic acid before and during pregnancy, becoming up to date with vaccinations, caring for your body and mind, and avoiding the use of alcohol or drugs during pregnancy;

Whereas, early identification of a child with a birth defect coupled with early intervention services typically improves the child's quality of life.

NOW, THEREFORE, I **[enter name here]**, GOVERNOR OF THE STATE OF **[YOUR STATE HERE]**, DO HEREBY PROCLAIM JANUARY 2022 AS NATIONAL BIRTH DEFECTS AWARENESS MONTH.

Sample News Release

Drop-in News Content

LEADING HEALTH EXPERTS EMPHASIZE 5 EFFECTIVE WAYS TO PREVENT BIRTH DEFECTS

'Healthy Communities, Healthy Babies.' Focus of National Birth Defects Prevention Month 2022

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 1, 2022

Contact: [**Name of person submitting release**]
[**Contact Phone Number**] – or – [**Contact Email**]

[**City, State**] – Birth defects and infant disorders are common, costly, and critical conditions that can cause lifelong health challenges. Birth defects are structural changes that can affect almost any part of the body, such as the heart, brain, or foot.

As medical care and treatment have improved, babies and children with birth defects are living longer and healthier lives. Most are now living into adulthood. Recent reports show that rates of infant deaths due to birth defects have declined by 10% in the United States. However, even today, every 4½ minutes a baby is born with a major birth defect.

Further, there are persistent racial/ethnic disparities when considering healthy communities and healthy babies. *“Sadly, we continue to see racial disparities both in the occurrence of birth defects as well as in survival of children born with birth defects -- it is essential that we work together to better understand the causes of these racial disparities so they can be addressed,”* said Dr. Sonja Rasmussen, Professor of Pediatrics at the University of Florida and Chair of the Board of Directors of the National Birth Defects Prevention Network.

Annually, the National Birth Defects Prevention Network (NBDPN) raises awareness of birth defects and promotes strategies that reduce the risk of birth defects and their complications. National Birth Defects Awareness Month is a time to raise awareness about birth defects and highlight efforts to improve the health of people living with these conditions across their lifespan. This year, NBDPN's theme is **“Healthy Communities, Healthy Babies.”** Not all birth defects can be prevented. However, we encourage all pregnant people and prospective parents to make healthy choices and adopt healthier habits to help lower their risk of having a baby born with a birth defect.

5 Tips for Preventing Birth Defects

- Tip 1: Be sure to take 400 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid every day.
- Tip 2: Book a visit with your healthcare provider.
- Tip 3: Become up-to-date with vaccines.
- Tip 4: Care for your body and mind before and during pregnancy to set you and your baby up for success.
- Tip 5: Boost your health by avoiding harmful substances during pregnancy, such as alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.

There is hope for a healthier future. Join NBDPN and our partners in improving health in your

community. Consider adding provider and parent [resources to our interactive map](#) so that together we can work towards a day when all babies are born with the best health possible.

The NBDPN education and awareness packet can be accessed online at <https://www.nbdpn.org/bdam.php>. Thank you in advance for promoting these tips for healthy communities and healthy babies for National Birth Defects Awareness Month!

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The NBDPN is a volunteer-based organization that addresses the issues of birth defects surveillance, research, and prevention under one umbrella by maintaining a national network of state and population-based birth defects programs. Contact us at nbdpn.org for more information.

National Birth Defects Awareness Month materials and activities are an output of the National Birth Defects Prevention Network (NBDPN). The contents of the awareness month materials and related promotional messaging are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by state public health agencies or other NBDPN members and partners.