

# 5 Prevention Tips for Healthy Communities and Healthy Babies

## Theme Resources

### 5 Prevention Tips for Healthy Communities and Healthy Babies.

NBDPN works to address birth defects through prevention as well as raising awareness about the impacts on individuals, parents, and families.

The CDC has a National Birth Defects Awareness Month [toolkit](#) which focuses on bringing awareness to birth defects across the lifespan. We encourage you to use these CDC materials along with our 5 Prevention Tips to address the multiple ways we can work together to prevent birth defects AND support those living with birth defects.

Not all birth defects can be prevented. But you can increase your chances of having a healthy baby by doing what you can to be your healthiest self both before and during pregnancy.

**Tip 1: Be sure to take 400 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid every day at least one month prior to conception.**

[Folic acid](#) is very important because when taken [before and during early pregnancy](#), it can help prevent some [major birth defects of the baby's brain and spine](#). Our bodies use this B vitamin to make new cells.

[Folate](#) is found naturally in certain fruits, vegetables, and nuts. Folic acid, the synthetic or man-made form of folate, is found in fortified foods (called "enriched foods"), such as breads, pastas, and cereals. Balancing all these foods to get the right amount of folic acid in your daily diet can be hard. The easiest way to get the right amount of folic acid is to supplement your diet with a multivitamin that has 400 mcg of folic acid every day.



Free vitamins containing folic acid are available in most states. Zoom in on your state on our Tips Resource Map on our webpage to get more information. Help us identify more resources by retweeting us with the local community resources that you've found to be helpful!

## Tip 2: Plan a visit with your healthcare provider to support a healthy pregnancy.

**Are you pregnant or thinking about pregnancy? Be sure to talk to your healthcare provider about these topics at your next visit!**



### ✓ Before pregnancy

Many pregnancies are unplanned. You and your partner should talk with your provider before getting pregnant. [Preconception health care](#) aims to promote the health of women of reproductive age before conception and to improve pregnancy-related outcomes. These important conversations can help reduce your risk of an unplanned pregnancy and increase your chance of having the healthiest pregnancy possible, when you're ready. Talk to your provider about ways to get/stay healthy, contraception and other counseling.

### ✓ Early and 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 pregnancy and address any questions that might arise along the way. So be sure to keep all [prenatal care](#) appointments.

### ✓ Discuss medication and supplement use

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, including prescriptions, over the counter, and supplements (herbal and homeopathic). 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. Discuss family history of medical conditions with your partner and healthcare professional. Based on your [family history](#), your doctor might alter your care or refer you for genetic or nutritional counseling.

### ✓ 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. The [National Maternal Mental Health Hotline](#) provides free help for those who are pregnant and parenting in English and Spanish.

### ✓ 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.

### Tip 3: Reduce Your Risk of Infections.

If you are pregnant or planning a pregnancy, infections can harm you and your baby. You can [reduce your risk](#) of infections by taking steps before and during pregnancy.



#### Vaccines:

- Talk with your healthcare provider about getting up to date on all your vaccines before becoming pregnant. If you are pregnant, [CDC](#) recommends two vaccines **during** every pregnancy: the inactivated flu vaccine (the injection, not the live nasal spray flu vaccine) and the Tdap (whooping cough) vaccine. Vaccines help protect you and your baby.
- If you are pregnant, a [COVID-19 vaccine](#) is recommended, which can protect you and your baby from severe illness.
- Vaccines are available at doctor's offices, [health centers](#), and many pharmacies. Most health insurance plans cover recommended vaccines at little or no cost to you. 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. Contact your state health department or refer to our Tip Resources Map for your state.

#### Infections to be Aware Of:

- [CMV](#) (Cytomegalovirus) is the most common infectious cause of birth defects. You can lower your risk by reducing contact with the urine and saliva of young children:
  - Do not share food, utensils, drinks or straws
  - Do not put a child's pacifier in your mouth
  - Kiss children on the forehead instead of the lips
  - Wash hands well after changing diapers
- [GBS](#) (Group B Streptococcus) is a bacteria that 1 in 4 pregnant women carry in their body. If you are pregnant you should be tested for GBS between 36-37 weeks of pregnancy. If you are positive, there are antibiotics that can be given during delivery to drastically reduce the chances of GBS affecting your baby.
- [Zika](#) is a virus that can cause severe birth defects. If you are pregnant, you should not travel to areas with Zika outbreaks.
- [Toxoplasmosis](#) is a parasite that can harm your baby. To reduce your risk:
  - Avoid changing cat litter if possible. If no one else can perform the task, wear disposable gloves and wash your hands with soap and water afterwards.
  - Wear gloves when gardening and wash hands afterwards.
  - Wash fruits and vegetables well. Cook meat thoroughly.
- [Listeria](#) is a bacteria that can harm you and your baby. It is found in contaminated food. Follow food safety guidelines and talk to your doctor about [foods to avoid](#).
- [STIs](#) (sexually transmitted infections) can harm you and your baby. You can reduce the risk by:
  - Practicing [safe sex](#) during pregnancy
  - Reporting concerning symptoms
  - Getting tested and treated for STIs

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

### ✓ Mental Health

Individuals with children or those that are expecting deserve the best - including the very best mental health. [Depression](#) and anxiety during and after pregnancy is common and treatable. If you think you have depression or anxiety, seek treatment from your health care provider as soon as possible. The National [Maternal Mental Health Hotline](#) provides free help for those who are pregnant and parenting in English and Spanish.

[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. Ask people you trust for help and accept help when you are able.

### ✓ Physical Health

Honor and listen to your body by [choosing nourishing foods](#) that you enjoy and [moving your body](#) in ways that give you energy. 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.

**Tip 5: Avoid 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](#), [e-cigarettes/vaping](#) 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. 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. Talk to your healthcare provider about getting the support you need.



It is important to discuss all medication and substance use with your healthcare providers. They will be able to help you access supports like medication assisted treatment, psychotherapy, or peer and community support. Abruptly stopping substances might cause withdrawal symptoms and harm to you and your baby. You do not need to go through this process alone. Obstetricians and Gynecologists and other health professionals can provide medical help, guidance and support. For help when it's needed, call or text the National Maternal Mental Health Hotline 1-833-9-HELP4MOMS(1-833-943-5746). TTY Users can use a preferred relay service or dial 711 and then 1-833-943-5746. You can also search for behavioral health providers on the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) [website](#).

For additional local resources, please refer to your state/county health department.

\*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"><li>• Infertility</li><li>• Miscarriage</li><li>• Birth defects</li><li>• Poor growth</li><li>• Preterm delivery</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Low birth weight</li><li>• Stillbirth</li><li>• SIDS</li><li>• Withdrawal symptoms / neonatal abstinence syndrome</li><li>• Learning problems / developmental delay</li></ul>
Talk with a healthcare provider and MotherToBaby to learn more about your specific exposures.	

## Social Media sample posts:

### Tip 1

**Folic acid** is very important because, when taken before and during early pregnancy, it can help prevent some major birth defects of the baby's brain and spine. Women of reproductive age should consume 400 mcg of folic acid each day. #HealthyCommunitiesHealthyBabies #NBDAM

Did you know that serious birth defects, such as spina bifida and anencephaly can be prevented if women take #FolicAcid daily **BEFORE** pregnancy? Start taking a daily multivitamin with folic acid for your baby's protection. For more information visit: <http://www.nbdpn.org/faaw.php>  
#HealthyCommunitiesHealthyBabies #NBDAM

With about half of U.S. pregnancies unplanned, all women of reproductive age should **consume 400 mcg of folic acid** to prevent birth defects. #HealthyCommunitiesHealthyBabies #NBDAM

### Tip 2

Visiting your healthcare provider before & during pregnancy is key, especially if stopping or starting any medication. Have questions about medication during pregnancy? Visit <https://bit.ly/3EywCIU> for access to expert information. #HealthyCommunitiesHealthyBabies #NBDAM

### Tip 3

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. Reducing your risk of infections helps you & your developing baby stay healthy.  
#HealthyCommunitiesHealthyBabies #NBDAM

### Tip 4

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

What is healthy for you is also healthy for your baby. Healthcare providers can accompany you in making choices to reduce the harmful effects of substances during pregnancy (including #alcohol & #tobacco). #HealthyCommunitiesHealthyBabies #NBDAM

# Proclamation

January is National  
Birth Defects  
Awareness Month!

## National Birth Defects Awareness Month, January 2023

**Whereas**, birth defects are common, costly, and critical conditions that affect 1 in every 33 babies born in the United States each year;

**Whereas**, annually approximately [enter number here] children in [enter your state here] are diagnosed with a birth defect;

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

**Whereas**, taking a daily vitamin with folic acid before and during pregnancy, planning a visit with your healthcare provider, reducing your risk of infections, caring for your body and mind, and avoiding the use of alcohol or drugs increases the chances of a healthy pregnancy;

**Whereas**, early identification of a child with a birth defect coupled with early intervention services can improve the child's quality of life;

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

**Whereas**, absence of health insurance coverage increases the likelihood that individuals with a birth defect may have poorer health status, be diagnosed with a condition later in life, and die prematurely;

**Whereas**, awareness of birth defects across the lifespan helps provide individuals, parents, and families affected by birth defects the information they need to seek proper care. It also provides healthcare professionals the evidence they need to deliver the best care for patients across all stages of life;

**Whereas**, Birth Defect Awareness Month provides the opportunity for families affected by these conditions to share their experiences and knowledge with the public, so that we all may be made more aware of how birth defects affect all our lives.

NOW, THEREFORE, I [enter name here], GOVERNOR OF [YOUR STATE HERE], DO HEREBY PROCLAIM JANUARY 2023 AS BIRTH DEFECTS AWARENESS MONTH in [YOUR STATE HERE].

# Sample News Release

## Drop-in News Content

### 'Healthy Communities, Healthy Babies.' Focus of National Birth Defects Prevention Month 2023 LEADING HEALTH EXPERTS EMPHASIZE 5 EFFECTIVE WAYS TO PREVENT BIRTH DEFECTS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
January 1, 2023

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

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

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 Genetic Medicine at John Hopkins School of Medicine and Board Member 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. Continuing the theme from 2022, NBDPN's theme this year 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 at least one month prior to conception.
- Tip 2: Plan a visit with your healthcare provider to support a healthy pregnancy.
- Tip 3: Reduce your risk of infections.
- Tip 4: Care for your body and mind before and during pregnancy to set you and your baby up for success.
- Tip 5: Avoid 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://bit.ly/3xeN12U>. Thank you in advance for promoting these tips for healthy communities and healthy babies for National Birth Defects Awareness Month!

# # #

*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](http://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.*