



Preparing For Motherhood: How To Protect Your Health And Your Growing Baby

(NAPSA)—Pregnancy is an exciting time, from decorating the nursery to reading every parenting book available. The most important thing expecting moms can do for themselves and their baby is to protect their health throughout pregnancy. Start by being aware of what the science says about preventing common conditions that can emerge during pregnancy and about daily supplements that can support your baby's development.

Taking Folic Acid

If you are pregnant or trying to become pregnant, it's important to take a daily vitamin that contains folic acid (0.4 to 0.8 mg). Folic acid is essential to your baby's growing brain and to spinal cord development. Too little folic acid has been linked to serious birth defects, which occur in about six to seven out of every 10,000 babies born. Ask your doctor which supplement is right for you.

Monitoring Blood Pressure

One of the most serious pregnancy conditions is pre-eclampsia. It's associated with high blood pressure after 20 weeks of pregnancy and can lead to life-threatening complications for moms and infants. It's a leading cause of preterm delivery (when a baby is born too early) and low birth weight in the United States, accounting for nearly one in five preterm births. Your doctor will screen you for pre-eclampsia by measuring your blood pressure throughout pregnancy. Fortunately, low-dose aspirin (81 mg per day) can reduce the risk of pre-eclampsia for some women at increased risk, so your doctor may suggest taking a low-dose aspirin every day to help protect you and your baby. Talk to your doctor about any questions you have.

Screening for Gestational Diabetes

Another health condition that can happen during pregnancy is gestational diabetes. Diabetes is a disease in which the body doesn't make enough insulin (a hormone) or use it correctly. This means the body can't turn starches or sugars from foods and drinks into the energy it needs to function, and the buildup of sugar in the blood leads to



Be good to your baby during pregnancy by looking after your own health.

complications throughout the body. About 6 percent of pregnant women develop gestational diabetes, which can cause difficult delivery and an increased risk of diabetes later in life. Babies born to mothers with gestational diabetes may have low blood sugar, which can increase a baby's risk of seizures and obesity later in childhood. Screening for the condition is fairly easy. Testing is done during weeks 24 to 28 of pregnancy, or earlier if there is a higher risk of gestational diabetes due to obesity or a family history of diabetes. This simple test consists of drinking 50 g of a sugary liquid and then measuring with a blood test to see how quickly your body gets rid of it. Ask your doctor about when you should take this important test.

Identifying Depression During or After Pregnancy

Some women experience depression during or after pregnancy—even if they didn't have symptoms before getting pregnant. If you feel persistent sadness, you aren't alone. About 10 percent of pregnant women experience major depressive episodes and these episodes can continue after the baby arrives. Depression may affect the baby, too, because it can disrupt a mom's ability to care for herself and her newborn. The good news is that depression can be managed through treatments like behavioral therapy, so check in with your doctor regularly about how you are feeling.

Screening for Infections

Screening for infections like HIV, hepatitis B, syphilis, gonorrhea and

chlamydia is another important part of caring for yourself and your baby during pregnancy. Some of these infections don't cause problems right away, which is why it's important to get tested early. Treating these infections during pregnancy will help reduce the chance that the infection will be passed on to your baby and cause complications.

A simple blood test can be used to detect three different kinds of infections: HIV, hepatitis B and syphilis. The HIV test checks for antibodies (disease-fighting proteins) that react specifically to the virus. Women with HIV are given antiviral medicines that greatly reduce the likelihood of the baby getting HIV. Screening for the hepatitis B virus should happen during your first prenatal visit and also involves a test that looks for certain antibodies. Infants born to mothers with the virus should get the hepatitis B vaccine and hepatitis B immune globulin (another disease-fighting protein) within 12 hours of birth to help prevent infection. Similarly, the syphilis bacterium is found through a blood test and antibiotics treat infection in the mother and help prevent infections and serious birth defects in the baby.

Screening for chlamydia and gonorrhea involves testing a urine sample or a swab from the vagina. If the test comes back positive, both conditions can be treated with antibiotics.

Talk to your doctor about these and other infections that can affect your pregnancy.

Recommendations to Protect You and Your Baby's Health

These recommendations were developed by the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force—an independent group of national experts in prevention. The Task Force makes recommendations, based on the latest science, about what works and what doesn't work when it comes to preventing disease and promoting good health.

For more information on these and other Task Force recommendations, visit www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org.