

FACT SHEET #9B

GOOD HEALTH BEFORE AND DURING PREGNANCY MAY HELP WOMEN TO PREVENT PRETERM BIRTH AND HAVE HEALTHIER PREGNANCY OUTCOMES

DURING PREGNANCY

- As soon as a woman thinks she is pregnant, she should make an appointment to begin early prenatal care and keep going for regular visits.
- She should continue taking her multivitamin every day until she sees the doctor. At that time, the health care provider may tell her to begin taking a prenatal vitamin every day, instead. Prenatal vitamins contain 600 mcg of folic acid, the amount needed during pregnancy. Folic acid helps to lower the baby's risk for developing serious birth defects that affect the brain and spine. These birth defects occur in the first 28 days of pregnancy, before most women realize they're pregnant. Folic acid is also necessary for the production of DNA, essential for rapid cell growth needed to make fetal tissue and organs early in pregnancy. This is why women need to have enough folic acid in their body *before, during, and after pregnancy*. Folic acid cannot be stored or "saved up" in the body. A pregnant woman must continue to consume enough folic acid every single day, and when pregnant, the exact amount that you need is in the prenatal vitamin.
- A pregnant woman should drink 8-10 glasses of water daily. It helps ensure that her body can replenish the amniotic fluid every 4 hours, as needed. Water can help to alleviate the symptoms of premature labor. It also aids digestion, can relieve constipation, and can help to prevent bladder infections (a risk for preterm labor).
- Avoid alcohol, tobacco, street drugs, and secondhand smoke.
- Ask her health care provider before taking any prescription medications, over-the-counter drugs, or herbal preparations. If she is taking a prescription medication and find out that she is pregnant, she should not stop taking the medicine until she talks to her health care provider.
- Avoid drinking more than 2 cups of caffeine-containing beverages (coffees, teas, colas, hot chocolate) a day. If she doesn't normally drink these types of beverages, she shouldn't start.
- Avoid saunas, hot tubs, and steam rooms. Pregnant women need to avoid overheating, especially during the first trimester, as it may increase the risk of certain birth defects of the baby's brain and spine.
- Avoid handling used cat litter or eating undercooked meat. These can cause an infection called toxoplasmosis and it is harmful to the baby.
- Try to avoid stress. She should reach out to other pregnant women, family and friends for support. If she feels depressed or unsafe at all, she should tell her provider; there are people who can help her.

- Gain the recommended amount of weight during pregnancy, usually 25 to 35 pounds for a woman who begins pregnancy at a normal weight
- Take an active role in her pregnancy and birth.
- Sign up for and attend prenatal classes.
- Ask for information on breastfeeding.
- See a dentist.
- Communicate with her health care provider and her partner.

Every week **does** make a difference.
Healthy Babies are Worth the Wait!