



# give your baby a healthy start

Caring for your baby starts today, not when your baby is born. You can take important steps before, during and after pregnancy to improve your baby's health.

Many of these steps are aimed at preventing premature birth, which can result in serious health problems for infants. Nine months of a healthy pregnancy is the best gift you can give your future baby. Sometimes, we don't know why a premature birth happens. We do know that there are many things you can do to reduce the likelihood of premature birth. Use the guidelines below to learn more about your healthy pregnancy.

Most doctors recommend that women begin taking a multi-vitamin supplement and at least 400 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid a day before getting pregnant. Taking folic acid is thought to reduce a baby's risk of developing neural tube birth defects such as spina bifida. Some doctors recommend starting prenatal vitamins several months before you get pregnant. Ask your doctor to recommend the dosage and type of vitamins and supplements for you.

Someone has probably already reminded you that you're "eating for two" now that you're pregnant. Typically, this is a reminder that you may need to eat more. Just as important, it tells you that you need to be careful about what you consume, because you're feeding it to your baby as well. If you put something in your body that can harm you, it can harm your baby even more. Be sure to avoid tobacco products, alcohol, and any drugs that haven't been approved by your doctor.



Cigarette smoking during pregnancy is the most significant and preventable risk factor for low birth weight and premature birth. Studies have shown that maternal smoking is a contributing factor in 14 percent of all premature deliveries in the United States. Additionally, the U.S. Public Health Service reports that if all pregnant women ceased smoking during pregnancy, it would result in a 10% decrease in infant deaths.

## **LEARN THE WARNING SIGNS OF PREMATURE LABOR**

If you experience even one of the signs below, call immediately.

- Contractions (your abdomen tightens like a fist) every 10 minutes or more often
- Change in vaginal discharge (leaking fluid or bleeding from your vagina)
- Pelvic pressure - the feeling that your baby is pushing down
- Low, dull backache
- Cramps that feel like your period
- Abdominal cramps with or without diarrhea

Source: National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information (NCADI)

**PRE-REGISTER FOR YOUR HOSPITAL STAY**

To make each expectant mother's birth a positive experience, begin the pre-admission process anytime after 24 weeks gestation.

Be sure to communicate any special needs to the OB pre-admission nurse to ensure your care and safety.

**BREASTFEED YOUR BABY**

Breastfeeding provides many benefits for infants and their mothers. Lactation consultants are specially trained to support breastfeeding mothers. Breastfeeding rates are monitored to evaluate the effectiveness of the support after you give birth.

