

# Protecting Yourself and Your Baby

Every pregnant woman wants to have a healthy baby. Studies are showing that your daily habits greatly affect your baby's outcome. Your baby is literally being made from what you eat, drink, and breathe. Take some time and think about this. What "raw materials" are you providing? Smoke (cigarettes or pot) instead of clean fresh air? Candy, potato chips, and donuts instead of lean meats, green vegetables, and fresh fruits? Soft drinks, Kool-Aid, and beer instead of milk and juices? We hope that this section will encourage you to develop the very best health habits possible during your pregnancy and, hopefully, forever.

## **Rule 1: Have regular checkups**

Come for regular checkups throughout your pregnancy. Because we charge for prenatal care as a package, not by the number of visits, limiting visits will not save you money, and may delay the discovery of potential problems.

In early pregnancy, we will want to see you every 3-4 weeks to make sure everything is going well. During the last 3 months, your visits will be more frequent.

Please notify us as soon as possible if you are having problems and need to be seen sooner than your scheduled appointment. Also call as soon as you realize that you will be unable to keep an appointment, so we can adjust our schedules.

As mentioned before, we welcome your husband/partner to come with you for prenatal visits. After your baby's heartbeat can be heard, your older children might enjoy coming along to listen. These visits are planned not only to follow your physical progress, but also to give you a chance to ask questions, discuss problems, and state your expectations for your care during labor and delivery

## **Rule 2: Eat right**

See pages 8-12 for information on a well-balanced diet for you and your baby.

## **Rule 3: Avoid food-borne illnesses**

Certain food-borne pathogens can be dangerous during pregnancy. Infections that are usually mild in healthy adults can be serious during pregnancy, and for the very young or very old. Two infections are of special concern during pregnancy.

*Listeria* is a bacterium most often found in soft cheeses, unpasteurized milk products, ready-to-cook or undercooked meat, poultry and seafood. It can even grow in refrigerated foods.

Listeriosis, although fairly rare, causes mild to severe flu-like symptoms in pregnant women, who can pass along the illness to their unborn child. Infection of the fetus can cause miscarriage, premature birth, blood poisoning and birth defects. Listeriosis can be treated with antibiotics.

*Toxoplasma gondii*, a parasite carried by cats, can also contaminate foods. Toxoplasmosis is most often acquired from eating undercooked meats or unwashed fruits and vegetables, from cleaning a litter box, or from handling contaminated soil without proper handwashing.



### Safe eating during pregnancy

Follow these simple precautions to protect you and your unborn baby from these and other food-borne dangers:

- **Wash your hands with hot, soapy water before meals, before preparing food, after handling raw meats, and after using the bathroom.**
- **Avoid cross-contamination by separating raw meat from other food.** Wash knives, cutting boards and dishes with soap and hot water. Always place cooked foods onto clean plates, and use clean utensils. Double wrap raw meat and poultry in your refrigerator to prevent juices from dripping onto other foods.
- **Cook raw meat and poultry until well-done.** Cook hamburger and pork to an internal temperature of 160°F, steaks to an internal temperature of 170°F, and chicken and lamb to an internal temperature of 180°F. Do not sample meat while cooking.
- **Reheat leftovers and ready-to-eat foods, like hot dogs and deli meats to steaming,** or to at least 165° F. Don't eat these foods if they cannot be reheated.
- **Wash fruits and vegetables thoroughly under running water.**
- **Don't eat pâtés.**
- **Don't eat raw shellfish.**
- **Avoid eating lake fish. And don't eat swordfish, shark, king mackerel, or tilefish while you are pregnant or nursing.** There are conflicting recommendations about the safety of eating albacore (white) tuna. The most conservative recommendation would be to limit albacore tuna to no more than 3 ounces per week, and any additional fish eaten during the same week, up to a total of 12 ounces, should be very low-mercury. Very low-mercury alternatives include: shrimp, pickerel, whiting, salmon, tilapia, sardines, catfish, flounder, and sole.
- **Don't eat products made from unpasteurized milk.** Avoid soft cheese such as Brie, feta, blue-veined, and Camembert. Hard cheeses, yogurt, and cream cheese are safe.
- **Avoid foods containing raw eggs.**
- **Don't drink unpasteurized juices or ciders.**
- **Store and maintain foods properly.** Refrigerate leftovers within 2 hours. Discard food that is left sitting out. Cover stored foods to keep out insects, rats, and pets. Discard foods past their expiration dates, and leftovers after a few days.

Another precaution to protect against oral exposure to *Listeria* and *Toxoplasma gondii* is to wear gloves and avoid touching your mouth while gardening or during other activities that involve contact with soil; be certain to wash your hands afterwards.

Talk with us if you suspect that you have been exposed to *Listeria* or *Toxoplasma gondii*. There are antibody tests for both diseases, and antibiotic treatment may be an option.

### Rule 4: Avoid exposure to toxoplasmosis

Toxoplasmosis usually causes no symptoms, or only a mild flu-like syndrome in pregnant women, but non-immune women can pass the infection to their developing fetus, causing miscarriage, disability, and mental retardation. Antibiotic treatment can sometimes reduce the severity of effects in the fetus.

The infection is spread by “the oral route,” meaning that the organism that

causes toxoplasmosis must be swallowed. Sources of toxoplasmosis include contaminated raw meat, cat feces, and soil which has been contaminated by cat feces. Thus it is wise for pregnant women to follow these precautions in addition to the ones under Safe Eating During Pregnancy:

- **Have someone else empty the cat's litter box!** Empty the box often and use a highly absorbent litter that will dry the feces. If you must clean the litter box, wear gloves and wash your hands afterwards.
- Wash your hands after playing with your cat, particularly before eating.
- Cover the children's sandbox when not in use.
- Do not feed your cat raw meat and, if possible, keep him from hunting and eating mice, birds, chipmunks, etc.
- Before taking in or baby-sitting a cat, consider its health and eating habits.
- As difficult as it may be for you, don't kiss your cat on the lips!

### **Rule 5: Treat illness**

Seek medical attention for problems that are not listed, or do not respond to the suggestions listed in the Common Illnesses or the Common Discomforts sections of this book.

Please inform us if you should need medical or surgical care for any problem, even if it seems unrelated to the pregnancy. Make sure any other health care providers who might care for you in an emergency know you are pregnant, and ask them to contact us.

### **Rule 6: Stay away from sick people**

Whenever possible, avoid contact with people who are ill. If you are not immune to rubella (German or 3-day measles) or varicella (chicken pox), tell us as soon as possible if you have been exposed. If you have been in contact with someone with Fifth disease (parvo virus), please let us know. This is also true for any suspected exposure to a sexually-transmitted disease (herpes, genital warts, gonorrhea, chlamydia, etc.). Please call right away (by the next day) with any of the above exposures.

When checking in for your appointment, please tell the receptionist if you suspect you have a contagious illness so other patients can be protected. Please leave sick children at home.

### **Rule 7: Avoid unnecessary x-ray exams**

**Before having an x-ray procedure done, tell the doctor or dentist ordering the test that you are pregnant.** If possible, postpone x-rays during pregnancy, unless they are necessary. If they are necessary, ask for the lead shield.

### **Rule 8: Avoid medications and drugs**

Take drugs only when absolutely necessary and only on our advice.

Remember that any medication or drug you take can affect your developing baby. Check with us before continuing any medicines you have been taking in the past. Do not assume that because you can buy something over-the-counter that it is harmless. Stop any vitamins, diet pills, pep pills, sleeping pills, tranquilizers, narcotics, nose drops, laxatives, etc.

**Please don't medicate yourself!** If you are sick, read the chapter on Common Illnesses, and if these suggestions are not helpful, let us know.

Obviously, there are times when the use of a prescription drug is necessary to restore your health or to protect your baby; however, we should be the ones to make this decision.



## Alcohol

Alcohol is as much a drug as anything you may take in pill form. Like all drugs, it passes through the placenta to your baby—and like all drugs, can be harmful.

The risks associated with alcohol use during pregnancy are an ongoing area of research. It has been well-documented that heavy use of alcohol by a pregnant woman can result in her baby having many physical defects as well as mental retardation. A higher incidence of miscarriage may be associated with even minimal drinking in early pregnancy.

Although researchers emphasize that more data must be obtained before a “safe” level of alcohol consumption during pregnancy can be established, they are urging pregnant women to consider the possibility that even small amounts of alcohol, especially during the early months, may be harmful.

## Stop smoking

Every time you inhale cigarette smoke, you draw nicotine, harmful gases and known carcinogens into your lungs and pass them along to your baby. Smoking also decreases the amount of oxygen reaching your baby. It has been demonstrated scientifically that smoking can retard your baby’s growth in the uterus, and make him/her more susceptible to illness after birth.

Smoking also increases the chances of premature delivery. Some studies have demonstrated decreased intelligence in children of smokers, and even a higher incidence of crib death.

- If you cannot stop, limit the number of cigarettes you smoke to as few as possible.
- Ask your partner to cut down or stop with you. Passive inhalation of smoke is also harmful.
- Avoid poorly ventilated, smoke-filled places.
- People who are unable to kick the smoking habit alone are often successful when encouraged by someone who cares. We care! If you want to quit but need help, tell us! Smoking is far more dangerous to your baby than nicotine patches, so ask us about them if you can’t stop on your own.
- Remember, you are deciding for two now. Please consider your baby.

## Marijuana

Preliminary studies have shown effects on the nervous system of the newborn if the mother has smoked marijuana frequently during the pregnancy. Marijuana is a drug; we recommend that its use be discontinued as soon as pregnancy is attempted or suspected.

## Exposure to industrial toxins and chemicals

Please let us know if you are exposed to chemicals, fumes, toxins, radiation, etc. in your work environment. Because the list of hazardous materials is updated frequently, do not assume that materials considered “safe” in the past are rated that way today. You can consult the Pregnancy Exposure InfoLine (1-781-466-8474) for up-to-date information.

## Sunscreens

Remember that damage caused by unprotected exposure to the sun can lead to skin cancer later in life, and it is safe to use sunscreens during pregnancy. A sunscreen with Helioplex provides better protection from both UVA and UVB rays. Choose a sunscreen product with a rating of 30-45.

## Sculptured nails

Although the safety of sculptured nails in pregnancy has never been studied,

we have some information based on the chemical components. Sculptured nails are formed by combining sacrylate with organic solvents. Sacrylates cause potent fumes, and animal studies have raised concerns about their safety. Long-term, high-level exposure to organic solvents is known to cause harmful central nervous system effects. So, for those pregnant mothers who choose to use sculptured nails, we suggest choosing a well-ventilated salon at non-peak hours to decrease the concentration of the fumes. It is also a good idea to wear a mask to decrease inhalation of sacrylate dust.

#### **Hair color and permanents**

Chemical hair processes have not been well studied in pregnancy. At this time, we are not aware of any increased risk from exposure to hair dye during pregnancy. However, since the scalp is very porous and has a good potential for absorption, one way to minimize risk is to choose hair color processes which minimize scalp contact, such as foils and highlighting.

The chemicals used in permanents have been detected in urine, so we know they are absorbed. But we don't know how much is absorbed, or how much reaches the fetus. For these reasons, we believe it's safest to wait until after the first trimester, if you choose to use chemical hair processes.