ABC's of Pregnancy

A Antepartum care is very important. Be sure you see your doctor and get prenatal care as soon as you think you are pregnant. At this time, you will be tested for infection, genetic abnormalities and potential problems with you and the pregnancy. This is the time to discuss diet, exercise, work, medications, labor, pain medication during labor and the possibility of a Cesarean delivery. Ask any questions that may concern you. It is important to see your doctor regularly throughout your pregnancy. **A**void exposure to toxic substances and chemicals - such as cleaning solvents, lead and mercury, some insecticides, and paint. Pregnant women should avoid exposure to paint fumes, and fumes that cause you to feel ill, dizzy or faint. When possible, it is a good idea to have a pre-pregnancy consultation with your caregiver to begin some important recommendations your caregiver suggests such as, taking folic acid, exercising, quitting smoking, avoiding alcoholic beverages, etc.

B Breastfeeding is the healthiest choice for both you and your baby. It has many nutritional benefits for the baby and health benefits for the mother. It also creates a very tight and loving bond between the baby and mother. Talk to your doctor, your family and friends, and your employer about how you choose to feed your baby and how they can support you in your decision. Not all **B**irth defects can be prevented, but a woman can take actions that may increase her chance of having a healthy baby. Many birth defects happen very early in pregnancy, sometimes before a woman even knows she is pregnant. Birth defects or abnormalities of any child in your or the father's family should be discussed with your caregiver. Get a good support Bra as your Breast size changes. Wear it especially when you exercise and when nursing.

C Celebrate the news of your pregnancy with the your spouse/father and family. Childbirth classes are helpful to take for you and the spouse/father because it helps to understand what happens during the pregnancy, labor and delivery. Cesarean delivery should be discussed with your doctor so you are prepared for that possibility. The pros and cons of **C**ircumcision if it is a boy, should be discussed with your pediatrician. **C**igarette smoking during pregnancy can result in low birth weight babies. It has been associated with infertility, miscarriages, tubal pregnancies, infant death (*mortality*) and poor health (*morbidity*) in childhood. Additionally, cigarette smoking may cause long-term learning disabilities. If you smoke, you should try to quit before getting pregnant and not smoke during the pregnancy. Secondary smoke may also harm a mother and her developing baby. It is a good idea to ask people to stop smoking around you during your pregnancy and after the baby is born. Extra Calcium is necessary when you are pregnant and is found in your prenatal vitamin, in dairy products, green leafy vegetables and in calcium supplements.

D A healthy **D**iet according to your current weight and height, along with vitamins and mineral supplements should be discussed with your caregiver. **D**omestic abuse and/or violence should be made known to your doctor right away to get the situation corrected. Drink more water when you exercise to keep hydrated. Discomfort of your back and legs usually develops and progresses from the middle of the second trimester through to delivery of the baby. This is because of the enlarging baby and uterus, which may also affect your balance. **D**o not take illegal drugs. Illegal drugs can seriously harm the baby and you. **D**rink extra fluids (water is best) throughout pregnancy to help your body keep up with the increases in your blood volume. Drink at least 6 to 8 glasses of water, fruit juice, or milk each day. A good way to know you are drinking enough fluid is when your urine looks almost like clear water or is very light yellow.

E Eat healthy to get the nutrients you and your unborn baby need. Your meals should include the five basic food groups. **E**xercise (30 minutes of light to moderate exercise a day) is important and encouraged during pregnancy, if there are no medical problems or problems with the pregnancy. Exercise that causes discomfort or

dizziness should be stopped and reported to your caregiver. **E**motions during pregnancy can change from being ecstatic to depression and should be understood by you, your partner and your family.

F Fetal screening with ultrasound, amniocentesis and monitoring during pregnancy and labor is common and sometimes necessary. Take 400 micrograms of **F**olic acid daily both before, when possible, and during the first few months of pregnancy to reduce the risk of birth defects of the brain and spine. All women who could possibly become pregnant should take a vitamin with folic acid, every day. It is also important to eat a healthy diet with fortified foods (enriched grain products, including cereals, rice, breads, and pastas) and foods with natural sources of folate (orange juice, green leafy vegetables, beans, peanuts, broccoli, asparagus, peas, and lentils). The **F**ather should be involved with all aspects of the pregnancy including, the prenatal care, childbirth classes, labor, delivery and postpartum time. Fathers may also have emotional concerns about being a father, financial needs and raising a family.

G Genetic testing should be done appropriately. It is important to know your family and the father's history. If there have been problems with pregnancies or birth defects in your family, report these to your doctor. Also, genetic counselors can talk with you about the information you might need in making decisions about having a family. You can call a major medical center in your area for help in finding a board-certified genetic counselor. Genetic testing and counseling should be done before pregnancy when possible, especially if there is a history of problems in the mother's or father's family. Certain ethnic backgrounds are more at risk for genetic defects.

H Get familiar with the **H**ospital where you will be having your baby. Get to know how long it takes to get there, the labor and delivery area, and the hospital procedures. Be sure your medical insurance is accepted there. Get your **H**ome ready for the baby including, clothes, the baby's room (when possible), furniture and car seat. **H**and-washing is important throughout the day, especially after handling raw meat and poultry, changing the baby's diaper or using the bathroom. This can help prevent the spread of many germs (*bacteria*) and viruses that cause infection. Your **H**air may become dry and thinner, but will return to normal a few weeks after the baby is born. **H**eartburn is a common problem that can be treated by taking antacids recommended by your caregiver, eating smaller meals 5 or 6 times a day, not drinking liquids when eating, drinking between meals and raising the head of you bed 2 to 3 inches.

I Insurance to cover you, the baby, doctor and hospital should be reviewed so that you will be prepared to pay any costs not covered by your insurance plan. If you do not have medical insurance, there are usually clinics and services available for you in your community. Take 30 milligrams of **I**ron during your pregnancy as prescribed by your doctor to reduce the risk of low red blood cells (*anemia*) later in pregnancy. All women of childbearing age should eat a diet rich in iron.

J There should be a **J**oint effort for the mother, father and any other children to adapt to the pregnancy financially, emotionally and psychologically during the pregnancy. **J**oin a support group for moms-to-be. Or, join a class on parenting or childbirth. Have the family participate when possible.

K Know your limits. Let your caregiver know if you experience any of the following:

- Pain of any kind.
- Strong cramps.
- You develop a lot of weight in a short period of time (5 pounds in 3 to 5 days).
- Vaginal bleeding, leaking of amniotic fluid.
- Headache, vision problems.
- Dizziness, fainting, shortness of breath.
- Chest pain.
- Fever of 100° F (37.8° C) or higher.
- Gush of clear fluid from your vagina.
- Painful urination.
- Domestic violence.
- Irregular heartbeat (*palpitations*).
- Rapid beating of the heart (*tachycardia*).
- Constant feeling sick to your stomach (*nauseous*) and vomiting.
- Trouble walking, fluid retention (*edema*).
- Muscle weakness.
- If your baby has decreased activity.
- Persistent diarrhea.
- Abnormal vaginal discharge.
- Uterine contractions at 20-minute intervals.
- Back pain that travels down your leg.

L Learn and practice that what you eat and drink should be in moderation and healthy for you and your baby. **L**egal drugs such as alcohol and caffeine are important issues for pregnant women. There is no safe amount of alcohol a woman can drink while pregnant. Fetal alcohol syndrome, a disorder characterized by growth retardation, facial abnormalities, and central nervous system dysfunction, is caused by a woman's use of alcohol during pregnancy. Caffeine, found in tea, coffee, soft drinks and chocolate, should also be limited. Be sure to read labels when trying to cut down on caffeine during pregnancy. More than 200 foods, beverages, and over-the-counter medications contain caffeine and have a high salt content! There are coffees and teas that do not contain caffeine.

M Medical conditions such as diabetes, epilepsy, and high blood pressure should be treated and kept under control before pregnancy when possible, but especially during pregnancy. Ask your caregiver about any medications that may need to be changed or adjusted during pregnancy. If you are currently taking any medications, ask your caregiver if it is safe to take them while you are pregnant or before getting pregnant when possible. Also, be sure to discuss any herbs or vitamins you are taking. They are medicines, too! Discuss with your doctor all medications, prescribed and over-the-counter, that you are taking. During your prenatal visit, discuss the medications your doctor may give you during labor and delivery.

N Never be afraid to ask your doctor or caregiver questions about your health, the progress of the pregnancy, family problems, stressful situations, and recommendation for a pediatrician, if you do not have one. It is better to take all precautions and discuss any questions or concerns you may have during your office visits. It is a good idea to write down your questions before you visit the doctor.

O Over-the-counter cough and cold remedies may contain alcohol or other ingredients that should be avoided during pregnancy. Ask your caregiver about prescription, herbs or over-the-counter medications that you are taking or may consider taking while pregnant.

P Physical activity during pregnancy can benefit both you and your baby by lessening discomfort and fatigue, providing a sense of well-being, and increasing the likelihood of early recovery after delivery. Light to moderate exercise during pregnancy strengthens the belly (*abdominal*) and back muscles. This helps improve posture. Practicing yoga, walking, swimming, and cycling on a stationary bicycle are usually safe exercises for pregnant women. Avoid scuba diving, exercise at high altitudes (over 3000 feet), skiing, horseback riding, contact sports, etc. Always check with your doctor before beginning any kind of exercise, especially during pregnancy and especially if you did not exercise before getting pregnant.

Q Queasiness, stomach upset and morning sickness are common during pregnancy. Eating a couple of crackers or dry toast before getting out of bed. Foods that you normally love may make you feel sick to your stomach. You may need to substitute other nutritious foods. Eating five or six small meals a day instead of three large

ones may make you feel better. Do not drink with your meals, drink between meals. **Q**uestions that you have should be written down and asked during your prenatal visits.

R Read about and make plans to baby-proof your home. There are important tips for making your home a safer environment for your baby. Review the tips and make your home safer for you and your baby. Read food labels regarding calories, salt and fat content in the food.

S Saunas, hot tubs, and steam rooms should be avoided while you are pregnant. Excessive high heat may be harmful during your pregnancy. Your caregiver will screen and examine you for sexually transmitted diseases and genetic disorders during your prenatal visits. Learn the **S**igns of labor. **S**exual relations while pregnant is safe unless there is a medical or pregnancy problem and your caregiver advises against it.

T Traveling long distances should be avoided especially in the third trimester of your pregnancy. If you do have to travel out of state, be sure to take a copy of your medical records and medical insurance plan with you. You should not travel long distances without seeing your doctor first. Most airlines will not allow you to travel after 36 weeks of pregnancy. **T**oxoplasmosis is an infection caused by a parasite that can seriously harm an unborn baby. Avoid eating undercooked meat and handling cat litter. Be sure to wear gloves when gardening. **T**ingling of the hands and fingers is not unusual and is due to fluid retention. This will go away after the baby is born.

U Womb (*uterus*) size increases during the first trimester. Your kidneys will begin to function more efficiently. This may cause you to feel the need to **U**rinate more often. You may also leak urine when sneezing, coughing or laughing. This is due to the growing uterus pressing against your bladder, which lies directly in front of and slightly under the uterus during the first few months of pregnancy. If you experience burning along with frequency of urination or bloody urine, be sure to tell your doctor. The size of your uterus in the third trimester may cause a problem with your balance. It is advisable to maintain good posture and avoid wearing high heels during this time. An **U**ltrasound of your baby may be necessary during your pregnancy and is safe for you and your baby.

V Vaccinations are an important concern for pregnant women. Get needed vaccines before pregnancy. Center for Disease Control (www.cdc.gov) has clear guidelines for the use of vaccines during pregnancy. Review the list, be sure to discuss it with your doctor. Prenatal **V**itamins are helpful and healthy for you and the baby. Do not take extra vitamins except what is recommended. Taking too much of certain vitamins can cause overdose problems. Continuous **V**omiting should be reported to your caregiver. **V**aricose veins may appear especially if there is a family history of varicose veins. They should subside after the delivery of the baby. Support hose helps if there is leg discomfort.

W Being overweight or underweight during pregnancy may cause problems. Try to get within 15 pounds of your ideal **W**eight before pregnancy. Remember, pregnancy is not a time to be dieting! Do not stop eating or start skipping meals as your weight increases. Both you and your baby need the calories and nutrition you receive from a healthy diet. Be sure to consult with your doctor about your diet. There is a formula and diet plan available depending on whether you are overweight or underweight. Your caregiver or nutritionist can help and advise you if necessary.

X Avoid **X**-rays. If you must have dental work or diagnostic tests, tell your dentist or physician that you are pregnant so that extra care can be taken. X-rays should only be taken when the risks of not taking them outweigh the risk of taking them. If needed, only the minimum amount of radiation should be used. When X-rays are necessary, protective lead shields should be used to cover areas of the body that are not being X-rayed.

Y Your baby loves you. Breastfeeding your baby creates a loving and very close bond between the two of you. Give your baby a healthy environment to live in while you are pregnant. Infants and children require constant

care and guidance. Their health and safety should be carefully watched at all times. After the baby is born, rest or take a nap when the baby is sleeping.

Z Get your **ZZZZZ**'s. Be sure to get plenty of rest. Resting on your side as often as possible, especially on your left side is advised. It provides the best circulation to your baby and helps reduce swelling. Try taking a nap for thirty to forty five minutes in the afternoon when possible. After the baby is born rest or take a nap when the baby is sleeping. Try elevating your feet for that amount of time when possible. It helps the circulation in your legs and helps reduce swelling.

Most information courtesy of the CDC.

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