

7. Avoid medications, except those prescribed by your doctor

Many medications can cause birth defects! Check with your doctor about the safety of taking drugs prescribed for you before your pregnancy began.

Remember that even common, everyday drugs, such as aspirin, should be used only with the permission of your doctor.

Besides medicine, avoid illegal drugs, such as cocaine, heroin, amphetamines (speed) or barbiturates (downers). These may retard the baby's growth inside the womb and lead to later behavioral and emotional difficulties.

8. Beware of x-rays

Take special precautions during pregnancy or suspected pregnancy. Have no x-rays without your doctor's full knowledge of your condition because the baby can be damaged if it is exposed to x-rays or radiation.

9. Avoid infectious diseases

Many infectious diseases, if contracted during pregnancy, can cause serious harm to your baby. Some of these include:

Toxoplasmosis. This disease is transmitted through infected under-cooked meat. It is also carried by cats and birds. Wash your hands thoroughly after cleaning a litter box or bird cage.

Syphilis. This is a sexually transmitted disease which is treatable by administering penicillin to the mother.

Herpes simplex virus. Genital herpes is another sexually transmitted disease which may harm the baby and even lead to the

infant's death. A baby delivered through an infected birth canal will be exposed to the virus. Your doctor may recommend a cesarean delivery to prevent the infection from being passed from mother to child. **Cytomegalovirus (CMV).** This is another virus from the herpes family and is the most common cause of uterine infection. The infection may be transmitted to the fetus.

HIV infection. The Human Immunodeficiency Virus causes AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome). Children may be infected from their mothers before being born. The drug AZT may help prevent the virus from being passed to an unborn child, if an HIV-infected woman takes it as directed by her doctor.

10. Continue to see your doctor

There is no substitute for expert medical care! You should have regular medical checkups once you become pregnant. Your doctor may detect abnormalities that may be corrected or reduced with constant care. You will be checked for Rh-negative blood. If you have Rh-negative and the father has Rh-positive, the baby's red blood cells may be damaged. The first pregnancy is not usually affected. An injection of Rh Immunoglobulin given within 72 hours of delivery can prevent Rh blood disease in the next pregnancy.

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Take Care of Yourself

Reducing the Risk of Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities (IDD)


The Arc.
Tennessee

Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) can happen to anyone. Many times it does not have to happen at all.

This brochure describes 10 steps you can take before you become pregnant and during your pregnancy to reduce the possibility of IDD affecting your child.

1. See your doctor before you get pregnant

There are a lot of things to know about having a baby. The best thing to do is see your doctor at least three months before you plan to get pregnant.

Your doctor can advise you about proper immunizations, diet, vitamins, testing for infectious diseases, exercise and other ways to help you have a healthy baby.

2. Eat the right foods

Good nutrition is essential for both you and your baby. You should eat a variety of meats, fish, vegetables, fruits, breads, cereals and dairy products. It is important to eat right long before you become pregnant.

You should also begin taking a daily multivitamin pill containing 400 micrograms (.4 milligrams) of folic acid three months before you become pregnant. This has been found to help prevent birth defects affecting the brain and spinal cord, such as spina bifida. You should also take prenatal vitamins throughout your pregnancy.

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3. Stop drinking alcoholic beverages

When you drink, so does your baby! Even small amounts of alcohol consumed during your pregnancy may affect the fetus in damaging ways. The most severe damage is fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS). Babies with FAS have low birth weight and never catch up with their peers in growth. They have central nervous system damage which may include IDD. They also have facial abnormalities and may have defects of the organs and body parts.

Other babies may have less severe birth defects not noticeable at birth. As they grow older, they may have learning disabilities and behavior problems.

To avoid the chance of your baby having any alcohol-related birth defects, the wisest choice is to avoid alcohol totally during your pregnancy.

4. Protect yourself with immunizations prior to pregnancy

You should be immunized against rubella, chicken pox, and possibly hepatitis B, as they may directly affect your baby. You may also need to be revaccinated against measles as many women of child-bearing age did not receive an effective vaccine as children.

Measles during pregnancy may cause miscarriage, premature labor and delivery or difficulties with labor. An antibodies test can determine your immune status.

Rubella is commonly known as German measles. If you get it during the first few months of your pregnancy, your baby can develop serious birth defects such as cataracts, heart damage, deafness, or IDD. A simple blood test will determine

whether or not you need to be vaccinated for rubella.

Hepatitis B is an inflammation of the liver which can be passed on to your unborn child. Health care and some other occupations place you at risk of infection. Consult with your doctor before your pregnancy about getting the vaccine.

Varicella, or chicken pox, has been associated with birth defects. A vaccine is also available for it.

5. Stop smoking

Every time you inhale cigarette smoke, you fill your lungs with nicotine and carbon monoxide. Your blood carries these impurities through the umbilical cord into your baby's bloodstream.

Smoking can restrict the baby's normal growth inside the womb. It can make your child underdeveloped and underweight at birth and prone to illness in the first critical weeks of life.

6. Get genetic counseling if you may be at risk

Many diseases and conditions in newborns are caused from defective genes or chromosomes inherited from the parents. Genetic counseling is available to couples concerned about the chance of birth defects. You and your partner might consider genetic counseling if:

- you are over age 35;
- you or your partner have a family history of genetic defects;
- you already have a child with a genetic disorder, unexplained IDD or a birth defect;
- you have had multiple miscarriages or stillbirths