

Checklist for Reducing the Risk of Birth Defects



What Everyone Should Know

- In the U.S., half of pregnancies are unplanned.
- Birth defects can happen very early in pregnancy, before you know that you are pregnant.
- Out of every 100 babies born in the U.S., two or three will have some kind of major birth defect.
- Causes of birth defects are largely unknown, although several risk factors have been identified.
- Timing of mother's nutrition (folic acid intake) is important for development of the fetus.
- Setting healthy habits early can lead to a healthy pregnancy months and years later in life.

To find out more about birth defects, please visit the California Birth Defects Monitoring Program website:
www.cdph.ca.gov/cbdmp

A Woman's Checklist Starts Before Pregnancy

- Consume 400 mcg folic acid every day from a multivitamin OR one serving of fortified cereal
- Use birth control if you are not planning a family
- Eat a balanced diet and participate in physical activity (www.mypyramid.gov)
- Identify and reduce emotional stresses
- Visit your doctor before you become pregnant to get **preconception care**:
 - Discuss taking 4 mg (=4000 mcg) of folic acid if you previously had a baby with a neural tube defect
 - Discuss your family history
 - Discuss risks due to your age
 - Get up-to-date on your immunizations (tell your doctor if you may already be pregnant)
 - Discuss stopping your current birth control
 - Discuss your health - especially high blood pressure, diabetes, epilepsy, or phenylketonuria (PKU)
 - Discuss your prescription medications
 - Discuss your over-the-counter medications
 - Discuss herbs and supplements you may take
 - Test and get treatment for any suspected vaginal or urinary infections
- When you are trying to become or are pregnant:
 - Avoid smoking, alcohol and substance abuse
 - Talk to your employer about minimizing hazardous exposures at work (pesticides, lead, mercury, radiation)
 - Read the labels on all products you use, and avoid those that are "toxic" or "organic solvents"
 - Cook all meat thoroughly & select safe foods
 - Avoid cat litter boxes and cat feces

