



830 Oak Street  
Brockton, MA 02301  
(508) 583-4961  
Fax (508) 583-4732  
Soheil.Hanjani@Steward.org

## **THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW BEFORE YOU GET PREGNANT**

(Preconception counseling)

### **Smoking**

The detrimental effects of smoking on general health are well known (e.g. heart disease, cancer, and chronic lung disease). Furthermore, women who smoke during pregnancy are at increased risk of premature labor, intrauterine growth retardation as well as other complications.

**Therefore, smoking is absolutely contraindicated during pregnancy.** Recent studies have demonstrated that men and women who smoke have decreased fertility. For your general and reproductive health, **if you do smoke you must stop.** If you are having difficulty trying to stop smoking, you should contact your primary care physician as soon as possible.

### **Alcohol**

Heavy alcohol intake can impair male and female fertility. An occasional drink has not been shown to be detrimental. However, after pregnancy is established, alcohol intake by the mother is absolutely contraindicated because of the effects it can have on the developing baby.

### **Caffeine Intake**

Caffeine's affect on fertility has been the subject of controversy. Several studies have demonstrated that an increase in caffeine intake decreases the chance of conceiving. However, a cause-and-effect relationship between caffeine intake and fertility has not been absolutely confirmed. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to suggest that women discontinue or at least limit their intake to one caffeinated beverage a day.

### **Drug Use**

The use of recreational drugs is contraindicated while attempting to conceive and during pregnancy. Some drugs such as marijuana, may decrease sperm concentration and testosterone hormone production in men. Other drugs such as cocaine and heroin may lead to severe withdrawal reactions in the baby after it is born. Further, the use of intravenous drugs increases the risk of acquiring the HIV infection.

### **HIV Testing**

An HIV infection can lead to the development of AIDS (acquired immuno-deficiency syndrome). Initially the disease was found primarily in homosexual, but the infection is being found increasingly in the heterosexual population. Of great concern is that many people who don't know that they are infected can infect others mainly through sexual contact. A woman who is infected with the virus can pass the infection to her unborn child.

## **Vitamin Supplementation**

Folic acid supplementation can significantly reduce the occurrence of neural tube defects in infants. Neural tube defects are abnormal developments of the spine and skull. One type of neural tube defect is spina bifida. Women who supplemented their daily with 0.4 mg of folic acid decrease the frequency of these neural tube defects by half. You should take an over-the-counter multivitamin preparation that contains 0.4 mg of folic acid.

Excessive intake of Vitamin A increases the chance of congenital anomalies. Prenatal vitamins and over-the-counter multivitamins usually contain 5,000 IU of Vitamin A, which is a safe dose; however, your daily intake should not exceed 5,000 IU.

## **Medication Use**

All prescribed medications as well as over the counter medication and supplements should be discussed to make sure they do not pose a danger for the pregnancy. It is also important that the physician who originally prescribed any medications be made aware that you are attempting pregnancy. You should avoid medications such as aspirin and aspirin-like compounds (such as Advil<sup>®</sup>, Aleve<sup>®</sup>, ibuprofen, Motrin<sup>®</sup>) around mid-cycle, since these medications can interfere with ovulation. Tylenol<sup>®</sup> is a suitable alternative.

## **Exercise**

The benefits of exercise on general health and mental well-being are well established. Exercise during pregnancy is also beneficial. If you are already in an exercise program, I encourage you to continue. If just starting, build up your activity slowly. Exercise activities such a swimming, bicycle riding, walking and using the treadmill or stairmaster are acceptable.

## **Intercourse timing**

If your menstrual cycle is 28 days long, and the first day of bleeding is day 1, then ovulation usually occurs on the 14<sup>th</sup> day. The most fertile days are from day 10 to 16. Using urine ovulation kits can help improve the timing, and should be used starting on day 11 until they turn positive.

## **Routine Gynecologic Care**

It is important for you to continue routine follow-up with your gynecologist or primary care physician. This should include a yearly blood pressure check, physical examination, pelvic examination and Pap smear. A baseline mammogram is recommended on every woman between the ages of 35-40. After the age of 40, every woman should have a mammogram every other year.