

PRECAUTIONS DURING PREGNANCY

SEX- Some people worry about having sex during pregnancy. They may be afraid it will cause a miscarriage. For a healthy woman with a normal pregnancy, sex is safe into the last weeks of pregnancy. The fetus is well cushioned by amniotic fluid. For your comfort, you and your partner may want to try different positions. Your doctor may advise you to limit or avoid sex if there are signs of problems in your pregnancy.

Both you and your partner may find your sex drives change now. Some women find they have a lower sex drive, some greater. Some see no changes at all. Your partner's feelings change too. Share your feelings with each other.

TRAVEL- Traveling any distance by plane, car or boat is fine until the last six weeks of pregnancy. Be sure to always use your seatbelt.

WORK- As a rule, you may continue to work without restrictions until the onset of labor or if some problem develops which requires early termination of employment or limitation of activity.

ALCOHOL- Do not drink alcoholic beverages when you are pregnant. Women who drink heavily during pregnancy have a high risk of having a baby with fetal alcohol syndrome. Babies affected with a fetal alcohol syndrome have severe physical and mental problems including mental retardation, slow growth and development, small heads and abnormal eye features. Even a moderate amount of alcohol may cause increased miscarriages and decreased birth weight. Since we do not know how much alcohol is "safe", the best decision is not to drink at all while you are pregnant.

DRUGS AND MEDICATION- Any drug that can cause addiction is dangerous. Cocaine and heroin users can addict their babies before birth. Some prescription drugs can harm the unborn baby. If you are on prescription drugs, be sure to tell your doctor. Remember, all medications cross the placenta and the baby gets a dose too. That is why "no medications" is best during the first trimester (14 weeks) while the fetus is being formed. However, if you must, the following list of medication may be taken in moderation: Tylenol Products, Sudafed, Robitussin for cough and colds, Roloids, Tums, Maalox or Mylanta for heartburn or stomach upset. Avoid any ibuprofen (Motrin or Aleve) or aspirin products.

CAFFEINE- It is a good idea to use as little caffeine as possible during pregnancy. While caffeine has not been shown to cause any birth defects, it is a stimulant, and like any other drug it crosses the placenta. Try to limit your intake of coffee, tea, cola and chocolate to two servings a day. Decaffeinated coffee and tea, herbal tea, and caffeine free soft drinks may be used in moderation.

ARTIFICIAL SWEETENERS- No harmful effects to the fetus have been documented; however, long term studies regarding artificial sweeteners and pregnancy have not been completed. We advise you to limit your intake of artificial sweeteners to two servings per day.

HOUSEHOLD HAZARDS- Avoid oil-based paints, turpentine and other petroleum-based products. If you paint, use a latex paint and make sure you are painting in a well ventilated room.

TOXOPLASMOSIS- Cats and some farm animals (pigs, sheep and cattle) may harbor a one celled parasite called toxoplasma. The disease caused by this organism is called toxoplasmosis. Humans can acquire toxoplasmosis by contact with material likely to be contaminated by at feces. Eating raw or undercooked meat is another way the infection is easily spread. Symptoms include fever, muscle pain and lymph node enlargement. Toxoplasmosis is such a mild disease that it is not usually noticed. It is estimated that 24% to 45% of women age 20-39 are already immune.

If toxoplasmosis is contracted by the pregnant woman for the first time, the organism can pass through the placenta to the fetus. It can cause mental retardation, blindness, hearing loss or cerebral palsy. A baby can be born with these defects or they can show up months or even years later.

Ways a pregnant woman can avoid toxoplasmosis are as follows:

- A) Wear gloves and a mask when changing the cat's litter box, or give the task to someone else.
- B) Wash your hands after handling or petting your cat.
- C) Do not give your cat raw meat
- D) Keep your cat indoors. If your cat has never been outside, he would never have been exposed to the parasite.
- E) Gloves should be worn when gardening.
- F) Do not eat raw or undercooked meat.
- G) Wash your hands after handling raw meat or vegetables.

FIFTH DISEASE- If you have a known exposure to fifth disease, call the nurse for testing to determine your immunity.

Fifth Disease is caused by parvovirus B19. About 50% of all adults have been infected during childhood or adolescence. Parvovirus B19 infects only humans. There are also animal parvoviruses, but they do not affect humans.

Usually, there is no serious complication for a pregnant woman or her baby because of exposure to a person with fifth disease. Sometimes, however, parvovirus B19 infection will cause the unborn baby to have severe anemia and the woman may have a miscarriage. This occurs in less than 5% of all pregnant women who are infected with parvovirus B19 and occurs more commonly during the first half of pregnancy. There is no evidence that parvovirus B19 infection causes birth defects or mental retardation.

RUBELLA (GERMAN MEASLES)- If a pregnant woman catches rubella (German Measles) during pregnancy there is a risk to her unborn baby. The first three months are the time of greatest risk to the baby. Infection can result in miscarriage, stillborn or birth defects. Your doctor can tell from a blood test at your first prenatal visit if you are susceptible to rubella. If you are immune to rubella, either because you have been vaccinated or had the disease, you do not have to worry about catching German Measles during your pregnancy. If you are not immune you will be offered the immunization following delivery.