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Pre – Conceptual Care Leaflet

ADVICE ABOUT PRE-CONCEPTUAL CARE

If you are thinking about becoming pregnant, especially for the first time, you may have a number of questions or worries. The best time to answer these is before pregnancy. All of our doctors, health visitors, and midwife and practice nurses will be happy to discuss any concerns you may have.

Identifying and dealing with any problems early will ensure you have the best chance of a happy healthy pregnancy.

Some of the things you may wish to discuss are mentioned below.

SMOKING

Smoking causes problems for both mother and baby. In the mother, it can make problems such as high blood pressure worse. In the baby, it has been shown to be associated with low birth weight and prematurity (early delivery).

For these reasons it is strongly advised that you should stop smoking. If you cannot stop completely then you should cut down the number of cigarettes you smoke as much as possible.

Recent research suggested that the smoke inhaled passively by a pregnant mother from a partner who smokes could also cause the same problems. Partners should also completely stop if they can, or cut down as much as possible.

DIET

Having a healthy balanced diet before and during pregnancy is important. Evidence shows that the risk of some birth defects such as spina-bifida may be decreased by taking a vitamin called folic acid for some weeks before, and during the early months of pregnancy.

You can buy folic acid tablets for this purpose. However, women with a family history of such problems are advised to take higher dose before pregnancy. A prescription will be required for a higher dose. Please ask for details if this applies to you.

Certain foods should be avoided. You shouldn't eat liver or take extra vitamin A supplements. Unpasteurised cheeses (e.g. Brie) or milk, soft-boiled eggs, pate or soft cheese may contain harmful bacteria and should be avoided.

ALCOHOL

Consumption of alcohol in any amount has been associated with abnormalities in newborn babies. The likelihood of an abnormality is related to the amount of alcohol drunk. It is therefore recommended that alcohol consumption be kept to a minimum or stopped around the time you plan to become pregnant and during pregnancy.

DRUG MISUSE

If you take medicines or tablets regularly, you should ask your doctor whether this might cause problems for the baby during pregnancy. The best time to discuss this is before pregnancy so that any potentially harmful medication can be changed.

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Certain minor illness remedies, such as for coughs and colds, can also cause problems. During your pregnancy, especially in the first three months, you should not take any tablets or medicines unless prescribed by your doctor.

The use of illicit hard drugs such as heroin is clearly associated with abnormalities and dependency syndromes in babies. These drugs should be avoided at all costs.

RUBELLA (GERMAN MEASLES)

If an expectant mother catches rubella in early pregnancy, the developing baby's sight, hearing, heart or brain can be severely damaged. For this reason it is important to know whether you are protected from rubella.

Many women have been immunised, or have had the infection as a child. Occasionally protection can be lost. Your GP can arrange for you to have a simple blood test, free of charge, which will tell whether you are protected. If you are not protected it is important that you are immunised at least one month before you become pregnant. You cannot be immunised during pregnancy.

GENETICALLY INHERITED CONDITIONS

If you have a family history of any congenital diseases (problems present from birth) then this can be discussed and in some cases investigated.

It is particularly important to know if you have had any previous problems in pregnancy. Screening for conditions such as Downs Syndrome is now available and your doctor or midwife will be able to guide you as to what is appropriate.

PRE-EXISTING MEDICAL CONDITIONS

Certain medical conditions can be affected by pregnancy. If you have diabetes, epilepsy, multiple sclerosis, thyroid disease, or any long-term illness, you should discuss it with your GP before becoming pregnant. Potential problems may be identified and specialist advice arranged if needed.

CONTACT WITH ANIMALS

Certain animals can carry bacteria that can cause harm to a developing embryo. Cats may carry toxoplasmosis. Sheep and goats may carry Brucella. These can harm a baby. Basic hygiene is very important. Wear gloves if cleaning cat litter, handling animals or working in the garden. Always wash your hands thoroughly afterwards. If you work closely with animals or you have any specific worries, your GP will discuss these with you.

GENERAL ADVICE

If you are due to have a smear this is ideally done before pregnancy.

Your GP can arrange for you to have a pregnancy test free of charge if you are unable to buy one at the chemist. You are likely to have to wait longer for the result if your doctor arranges one. If your pregnancy test is positive or you know you are pregnant, arrange to see your doctor or midwife as early as possible.

If you are able to make a note of the first day of your last period this will help in predicting when your baby is due.