

The importance of pre-natal care

Written by Melody Mendiola
Monday, 10 May 2010 13:45

In the United States, prematurity/low birth weight is the second leading cause of all infant deaths during the first year of life.

According to the Office of Minority Health, during 2000-2002 in the United States, African American mothers were nearly 2.5 times as likely as non-Hispanic white mothers to begin prenatal care in the third trimester, or not receive prenatal care at all.

As a result, preterm birth rates were highest for Black infants (17.6 percent) than other minorities. African American infants were over four times as likely to die from causes related to low birth weight, compared to non-Hispanic white infants.

Prenatal care is important in making sure you and your baby stay healthy throughout pregnancy and the birth of your child.

What is prenatal care?

Prenatal care is the health care you get while you are pregnant. Take care of yourself and your baby by:

- Getting early prenatal care. If you know you're pregnant, or think you might be, call your doctor to schedule a visit.
- Getting regular prenatal care. Your provider will schedule you for many checkups over the course of your pregnancy. Don't miss any — they are all important.
- Following your provider's advice. Eat a healthy, balanced diet, get regular exercise if your provider feels it is safe to do so. Do not smoke cigarettes or drink alcohol while you are pregnant.

Who provides prenatal care?

Physicians who specialize in obstetrics and gynecology usually provide prenatal care.

In addition, certified nurse-midwives (CNMs) are advanced practice nurses with specialized training and experience in midwifery. CNMs provide prenatal care, labor and delivery, care after birth, yearly gynecological exams, assistance with family planning decisions, preconception care, menopausal management and counseling in health care management and disease prevention. They can prescribe medication, perform medical procedures and provide other interventions when medically necessary.

Many family practice physicians also provide obstetric care. They can provide continuity of care across the life spectrum, and can care for the entire family.

At Hennepin County Medical Center, The Nurse-Midwife Service is a practice of certified nurse-midwives who care for women throughout their life, including during pregnancy, labor and birth. The midwives see patients in seven locations throughout the metro area and deliver babies at Hennepin County Medical Center.

We also have family practice doctors who provide obstetric care at all of our community clinics, as well as a full service OB/GYN clinic at HCMC. The High Risk OB clinic, at the HCMC OB/GYN clinic provides multispecialty care to address the needs of a wide range of complicated

The importance of pre-natal care

Written by Melody Mendiola
Monday, 10 May 2010 13:45

pregnancies. It is staffed by board certified perinatologists, an internal medicine physician, a psychiatrist, and a dietician.

What can I expect from prenatal checkups?

During pregnancy, regular check-ups are very important. This consistent care can help keep you and your baby healthy, spot problems if they occur, and prevent problems during delivery. Typically, routine checkups occur:

- Once each month for weeks 4 through 28
- Twice a month for weeks 28 through 36
- Weekly for weeks 36 to birth

Women with high-risk pregnancies need to see their doctors more often.

At your first visit your doctor or midwife will perform a full physical exam, take your blood for lab tests, and calculate your due date. They might also do a breast exam, a pelvic exam to check your uterus (womb), and a cervical exam, including a Pap test. During this first visit, your doctor or midwife will ask you lots of questions about your lifestyle, relationships, and health habits. It's important to be honest with your doctor or midwife.

After the first visit, most prenatal visits will include:

- Checking your blood pressure and weight
- Checking the baby's heart rate
- Measuring your abdomen to check your baby's growth

You also will have some routine tests throughout your pregnancy, such as tests to look for anemia, tests to measure risk of gestational diabetes, and tests to look for harmful infections.

Where can I get prenatal care?

Most hospitals that deliver babies, like the Birth Center at Hennepin County Medical Center, provide prenatal care. In addition to regularly seeing your doctor or midwife, classes are often available on preparing for childbirth, breastfeeding, newborn care, sibling preparation, infant and child CPR and more.

What Is Centering Pregnancy®?

Available at Hennepin County Medical Center locations, CenteringPregnancy® is prenatal care in a group with other women who are also pregnant. Groups of eight to 12 women are seen together throughout their entire pregnancies. Group sessions, available in both English and Spanish, are led by a doctor or midwife and a prenatal educator. This often proves to be a powerful bonding experience, as women of different backgrounds progress through the joys and challenges of pregnancy together.

Groups follow the same schedule as standard prenatal visits.

At each appointment, patients:

- Spend individual time with the doctor or midwife talking about their own health and the baby's health.
- Ask questions and support each other throughout the pregnancy experience.
- Are told about community services and important information about their pregnancy.

The importance of pre-natal care

Written by Melody Mendiola
Monday, 10 May 2010 13:45

Who do I call for more information?

For more information about prenatal care available through Hennepin County Medical Center, call 612-873-BABY (2229). To learn more about Centering Pregnancy, call (612) 873-2530.

Melody Mendiola, MD, is a board-certified general internal medicine doctor and medical director of Hennepin Care North, a clinic of Hennepin County Medical Center, located in Brooklyn Center, MN. Dr. Mendiola is accepting new patients at Hennepin Care North. To schedule an appointment, call (612) 873-8800.