

ROCHESTER AREA BIRTH NETWORK

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How to Stay Healthy and Low Risk during Pregnancy, Labor, and Birth

Pregnancy can be a wonderful and exciting time of life for most women. However, women in the United States receive very little information about healthy pregnancy unless they do a lot of individual research. Obstetricians have time constraints, and receive little or no training in nutrition, exercise, or preventative medicine. Few women know that they have many choices with regard to the birth of their child. They are never told that there are ways that they can help themselves to have a healthier pregnancy, labor and birth. Many of the women who join childbirth classes never receive this information, or if they do, it is very late in the pregnancy. Below are 8 ways to help educate yourself in how to stay healthy and low risk during pregnancy, labor, and birth.

- 1) **Nutrition** – If you only did one thing to help yourself stay healthy during pregnancy, good nutrition would be it! It is the single most important factor in having a healthy baby and a healthy mom. Eating well in pregnancy means following the Brewer diet which consists of 75–100 grams of good quality protein per day, from varied sources. Great high protein food sources include: meats, soy products, eggs, dairy, nuts, beans, and seeds. You should also be eating 5 servings of high complex carbohydrates to ensure adequate calories for energy, and an additional source of protein. In fact one-third of your protein should be coming from whole grains. This would include whole grains that are not milled or processed, and will retain the most nutrients, protein, and fiber. Eating dairy, soy, nuts, and bean products, and broccoli will assist in getting enough calcium. Additional healthy foods to include would be whole, fresh fruits, and vegetables, and don't forget to drink to thirst and salt to taste! But try to avoid desserts and junk food. Organic food sources are highly recommended when available. Think color and variety! This will help you obtain all the nutrients your body needs to build a healthy baby. Eating right during pregnancy can help to prevent premature labor and birth, toxemia, placental abruption, gestational diabetes, problems with breast feeding and healing, and many other serious health problems that would place a mom in the high-risk category.
- 2) **Exercise** – Pregnancy exercises can help prepare your body for the birth of your baby, by targeting specific muscles used during labor. Regular physical exercise can help to build strength and stamina. It also makes it easier to recover after birth. Check with your care provider as to any physical limitations you may have
- 3) **Education** – Educating yourself with regard to all the issues involving pregnancy and birth will help you to make responsible decisions that are right for you and your family. As the authors of [A Good Birth, A Safe Birth](#) said, “If you don't know what your choices are, then you don't have any!” There are many different types of childbirth classes, and you need to research to find out which one will fit your needs. A good book to help in this search is [The Birth Book](#), by Dr. William Sears, and Martha Sears, RN. Educating yourself well will help you to avoid unnecessary health risks common in birth in the United States today. This would include educating yourself as to the necessity of routine testing and procedures during pregnancy. Before consenting to routine testing or procedures be sure that they are being done for a true medical need or problem. You need to be aware of the risks and benefits of all tests and procedures during pregnancy. Excellent sources of information on this topic include Henci Goer's book [Obstetric Myths vs. Research Realities](#), and Barbara Katz Rothman's book [The Tentative Pregnancy](#).
- 4) **Avoidance of harmful substances** – Everyone knows that you should avoid all street drugs during pregnancy so your baby will not be harmed, but there are many other substances that should also be avoided to have a healthy pregnancy. They include tobacco, alcohol, caffeine, pollution, pesticides, household and industrial chemicals, and any medically unnecessary medications, including over-the-counter medications. According to the AAP, the PDR, and the FDA there is no drug that is considered safe during pregnancy. Sadly this would also include all medications commonly given during birth,

as they all reach the baby, and can have negative side effects for both the mom and baby. Any medication given to a pregnant or laboring woman should be for a true medical problem only. All prescription medications should be taken to your careprovider and checked to see if they are truly necessary during pregnancy, and if there may be a safer medication or a smaller dose might be appropriate. Before taking anything you should always check with your careprovider first!

- 5) **Choosing a birth attendant wisely** – When choosing a doctor or midwife to assist at your birth, it is important you choose one who not only matches your birth philosophy, but also respects your right to make choices that are right for you. Be sure to interview all candidates before choosing. Think about what kind of a practice you would be comfortable with. Would you prefer a large practice of doctors or midwives, or a small practice of only one or two careproviders? If you discover along the way that you are no longer comfortable with your original choice, it is important to know that you have the right to change careproviders. Choosing wisely the first time will create less stress in your life.
- 6) **Choosing your birth place wisely** – When choosing where to have your baby it is good to know that home births have been shown to be as safe, if not safer, than hospital births. Think about where you will feel the safest, and most comfortable. If you feel safest in a hospital setting, then that may be a good choice for you. This of course, will depend on your health status. Only low risk women will be accepted for a homebirth. While it is possible to have a healthy natural birth in a hospital setting, it is certainly more difficult.
- 7) **Doulas** – Consider hiring a professional labor assistant to help you through your labor. Studies have shown that having a doula can reduce the need for medication, cesarean sections, Pitocin to speed up labor, and other interventions common in birth today. It's also wonderful to have backup for your primary labor support person in the event of a long labor.
- 8) **Birth plans** – Never assume that everyone attending your birth knows what you do and don't want! Create a birth plan that outlines your ultimate goals and priorities. To do this you will need to educate yourself with regard to all aspects of birth in the United States so that you know what your priorities are.

(For more information on each of these topics check the list of available printed information and contact RABN directly at www.rabn.org)

Recommended Reading:

The Birth Book by William Sears, M.D. & Martha Sears, RN

The Thinking Woman's Guide to a Better Birth by Henci Goer

The Brewer Pregnancy Hotline (The Brewer Diet) by Krebs and Brewer
(Available on line at www.blueribbonbaby.org)

Natural Childbirth the Bradley Way by Susan McCutcheon

A Wise Birth by Armstrong & Feldman

A Good Birth, A Safe Birth by Korte & Scaer

Gentle Birth Choices by Barbara Harper

Active Birth by Janet Balaskas

Obstetric Myths vs. Research Realities by Henci Goer

The Tentative Pregnancy by Barbara Katz Rothman

Diary of A Midwife – The Power Of Positive Childbearing by Juliana Van Olphen-Fehr

Ina May's Guide to Childbirth by Ina May Gaskin