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Healthy Sunday Topic: Maternal and Child Health

There are approximately 1.7 million women of childbearing age (between ages 18 to 44 years old) in North Carolina. They are our mothers, our sisters, our aunts, our friends, and our neighbors. The health of these women is directly linked to the health of their babies and can have an impact on the health of their families and community as well.

What could affect a child's health?



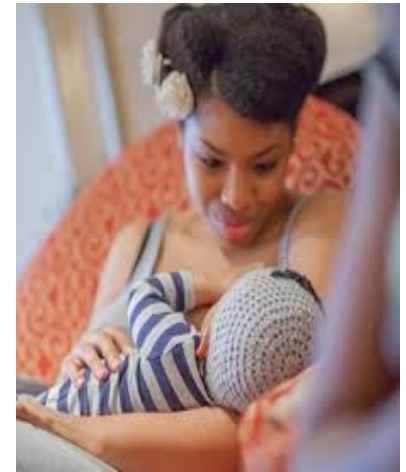
- **Risky behaviors** such as smoking, alcohol misuse, inadequate physical activity, and poor nutrition can contribute to reduced life expectancy as well as poor pregnancy outcomes including preterm birth, low birth weight, and birth defects.
- **Poor mental and emotional health** affects physical health and this affects the health of the child. More than one in five (24%) of North Carolina women ages 18–44 report that they do not get the social or emotional support that they need, and 16 percent of new mothers report that they did not have adequate social and emotional support available to them after delivering their baby.
- **Sexually transmitted infections** – in NC, African American women suffer a disproportionately high rate of sexually transmitted infections including HIV. Women who suffer from these infections and become pregnant place themselves and their babies at risk for complications including prematurity, low birth weight, long-term disability, and death.
- About 43% of pregnancies in NC are unintended, meaning mistimed or unplanned pregnancies. **Unintended Pregnancies** are associated with poor birth outcomes. Couples with unplanned pregnancies may have risk factors or be engaging in behaviors that put their own health and unknowingly the health of their unborn child at risk. Healthy timing and spacing of pregnancy provides couples the opportunity to prepare for the healthiest pregnancy possible. Unintended pregnancy has been associated with elective abortions, late entry into prenatal care, low birth weight, and child abuse and neglect.



Sean E. McLean, MD. Assistant Professor of Surgery at UNC School of Medicine, Chapel Hill NC says, “Healthy women are the foundation of a strong community, and healthy newborns are the future. To protect our future, we have to work on giving our children the opportunity to live without disparities or with fewer disparities in health.”

What Can We Do?

- ✓ Exercise regularly, include fruits and vegetables in the diet, do not engage in risk behaviors, and planning for pregnancies.
- ✓ Health care providers recommend that all women of reproductive age take **folic acid** on a daily basis. Folic acid can reduce the incidence of neural tube defects by up to 70 percent and has the greatest effect in the very early weeks of development, before women even realize they are pregnant.
- ✓ **Immunizations**- Women who are up to date on their immunizations, including hepatitis B, chickenpox, and rubella, also protect themselves and their babies from becoming ill with these infections.



Remember Your ABCs

- **A**lways eat a well-balanced diet with a multivitamin supplement and exercise regularly
- **B**efore trying to conceive, learn about your family history (some illness are inherited), and If you have pre- existing health conditions, discuss your desire for attempting pregnancy with your healthcare provider first; then, follow your healthcare provider’s recommendations
- **C**autious: Stop smoking; do not drink alcohol while trying to conceive and after conceiving; seek prenatal care early; check your blood pressure regularly; and check for gestational diabetes.

Health Tip is a message from Community Health Coalition, Inc. and is written in partnership with Central Carolina Black Nurses’ Council Inc., The Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance of Durham and Vicinity, and Duke Regional Hospital.

REMEMBER Healthy People 2020: A Clear Vision to Healthy Living!