

Being Healthy for Your Baby *An Expectant Mother's Guide to Prenatal Care*

Expectant mothers who receive routine prenatal care – the medical attention a woman receives throughout her pregnancy – are more likely to have healthier babies and less likely to deliver prematurely or have other serious problems during pregnancy.

Many women, particularly first-time mothers, are often unaware of what takes place at prenatal check-ups. That's why First 5 Shasta provides the following guide to help you understand what to expect during your prenatal appointments.

The First Step

Prenatal care begins at conception. Once you know or think you may be pregnant, visit a health care provider right away. Your health insurance company can recommend a doctor or midwife in your area who specializes in pregnancies. If you are pregnant and currently without health insurance, there are low or no-cost health insurance options available. Begin by consulting with your local Medicaid office to determine if you are eligible.

After deciding on your health care professional, you will meet with him or her regularly throughout your pregnancy.

What to Expect at Your First Appointment

Your first visit to your health care professional should take place as soon as you find out you are pregnant. For the first visit, your doctor or certified midwife will:

- **Review medical history:** Knowing your medical history as well as your family's and the baby's father's history will allow your health professional to monitor or anticipate any problems that could occur during your pregnancy. Answer as many questions as you can, but do not worry if you cannot answer them all.
- **Determine your due date:** Women typically deliver within two weeks of their due dates.
- **Perform a physical exam:** Your health care provider will perform a variety of exams to check your health and make recommendations for how you can have a healthy pregnancy. Be sure to inform him or her if you smoke, as smoking is harmful to you and your pregnancy.
- **Do blood and health tests:** Using these tests, the doctor or midwife will determine your blood type and whether you have any infections that could harm the baby. If you do have an infection, the doctor or midwife can usually treat it without affecting your pregnancy.
- **Provide healthy pregnancy tips and local resources:** Your health care professional will provide tips on how to stay healthy during your pregnancy, such as making nutritious food choices and taking prenatal vitamins. You may also discuss local pregnancy resources, such as childbirth classes, the *Kit for New Parents* and your local Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program.
- **Schedule your next appointment:** Be sure to schedule your next visit for the following month.

Follow-up Prenatal Appointments

After your first appointment, prenatal care visits are usually shorter and more routine. Your health care provider will likely perform the following:

- Check your heart rate and blood pressure
- Measure your weight gain and the growth of your stomach
- Check your hands, feet and face for swelling
- Listen to the baby's heartbeat
- Feel the baby's movement and position in your abdomen
- Conduct any tests needed, such as blood tests or ultrasounds

Prenatal Care Schedule

A typical prenatal care schedule for a woman with a normal pregnancy includes the following:

- During **weeks 4 to 28** of your pregnancy, visit your health provider **once per month**.
- During **weeks 28 to 36**, visit **twice per month**.
- In the last weeks of your pregnancy (**week 36 until delivery**), visit your doctor or midwife **once per week**.
- A woman with a "high-risk" pregnancy may have to see her health care professional more often.
- Even if you are feeling fine, it is important to attend all prenatal appointments.

First 5 Shasta encourages all mothers-to-be to visit their health care providers early and often. For more information from First 5 Shasta on prenatal care, request your free *Kit for New Parents* from distribution partners listed at www.first5shasta.org (see Programs & Activities).

About First 5 Shasta

Research shows that a child's brain develops most dramatically in the first five years and what parents and caregivers do during these years to support their child's growth will have a meaningful impact throughout life. Based on this research, California voters passed Proposition 10 in 1998, adding a 50 cents-per-pack tax on cigarettes to support programs for expectant parents and children ages 0 to 5. First 5 Shasta has invested over \$12 million in Prop. 10 revenues in programs and services that meet local needs.

Sources: *March of Dimes and the Mayo Clinic*

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