

## Pregnant! A Letter for You!



You're expecting a baby! Congratulations!

We hope that your pregnancy will be a joyful experience. It is good to know what to expect during pregnancy. In this letter I explain "six musts", "five don'ts" and "ten important things" to keep in mind in order to protect your baby and keep you healthy and fit.

### ***"Six Musts":***

- Maintain good mental and emotional health: Studies are still ongoing, but are increasingly showing links between maternal stress and the health of the unborn baby. Chronic stress during pregnancy may lead to miscarriage, pre-term births, low birth weight and an easily overstimulated baby. There might be a chance that babies who experience stress in utero are more likely to develop health problems later on in life, such as heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, cancer, ADHD, bipolar and anxiety disorders. Even though most mothers-to-be will have times of worry and stress, it is important to lead a "healthy, balanced lifestyle" to avoid too much stress. This is a good opportunity for expectant dads to emotionally and practically support their partner.
- Stay active: Exercise in pregnancy is beneficial as it increases your energy levels, it increases the oxygen flow to the placenta, and it may reduce your chance of getting varicose veins or cramps. Keep your normal daily activity or exercise within your body's limits. You should be able to hold a conversation through the exercise and you shouldn't get too out of breath. If you weren't active before you got pregnant, don't suddenly take up strenuous exercise. Walking or swimming are great ways to stay fit. Try to exercise at least 150 minutes per week.
- Take supplementation as necessary: Take 0.4 mg of Folic Acid per day to prevent birth defects of your baby's brain and spinal cord. Start three months before pregnancy and continue until the third month of pregnancy. Calcium is needed to protect and preserve your bones. Your developing baby also needs calcium to build strong bones and teeth. Calcium supplementation in pregnancy might reduce the risk of pregnancy-induced hypertension, it might protect against low-birth weight and it might prevent hypertension in the next generation. Vit D is important for the absorption of calcium and will help to prevent rickets in your baby and keep your teeth and bones healthy. Anemia is a common problem in pregnancy. Anemia might lead to fatigue, being short of breath while exercising, dizziness, and being more susceptible to infections. So, it is important that your food contains sufficient Calcium, Vit D, and Iron. (Read handout "Do I Need to Take Calcium, Vit D, Folic Acid and Iron Supplements?")
- Have regular antenatal check-ups: Most pregnant women are healthy and will be able to have a normal pregnancy and deliver a healthy baby. However, complications can arise. The earlier we discover any deviations from normal, the earlier we can start treatment and prevent things from getting worse. Go and see a doctor or midwife early on in pregnancy, at least before the 16<sup>th</sup> week of pregnancy. An ultrasound scan, blood tests, and regular check-ups (including calculating your due date, the number of weeks you're pregnant, taking your blood pressure, measuring your weight, doing an abdominal examination, asking about fetal movements, checking for varicose veins and oedema, testing your urine, giving advice) are all part of good antenatal care. The doctor or midwife will record all observations in a booklet. Bring these records with you whenever you have an antenatal check and when you go to the hospital to have your baby.
- Have a healthy diet: A well balanced diet will help you to feel fit and stay healthy and it will help the baby to develop and grow. (Read handouts "A Healthy Diet in Pregnancy" and "Eating Safely in Pregnancy".)
- Watch your weight: If you're overweight, you will have a greater chance of developing diabetes, high blood pressure, and heart disease; during pregnancy there is an increased risk of pregnancy induced hypertension, and it might affect breastfeeding. If you gain too much weight during



pregnancy, then you might have a large baby, which may affect the birth and might lead to overweight in your baby later on in life. Have a good balanced diet, don't overeat, but don't go on a diet either. If you gain less than a kg or more than three kg per month after your 20<sup>th</sup> week of pregnancy or if you suddenly gain a lot of weight (more than a kg per week), you should go and see your doctor or midwife.

### ***“Five Don'ts”:***

- Don't smoke; keep the air fresh: Passive or active smoking during pregnancy may lead to pre-term birth, low birth weight, and birth defects, it may damage the baby's defense system making him more prone to infections. Cigarette smoke can restrict the oxygen supply to your baby, causing his heart to beat faster. Smoking affects the development of your baby's lungs as well as his physical and intellectual development. It increases the risk of stillbirth and cot death.
- Don't consume alcoholic drinks: Alcohol passes from your blood through the placenta to your baby. Drinking alcohol in the first three months of pregnancy increases the risk of miscarriage, premature birth and low birth weight. Drinking after the first three months of pregnancy could affect your baby after he or she is born; it can lead to learning difficulties and behavioral problems. Excessive alcohol consumption in pregnancy may lead to Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS), affecting baby's mental and physical health. No alcohol consumption during pregnancy is the safest advice.
- Don't take medicines without medical advice as some medicines may harm your unborn baby.
- Don't have an X-ray during pregnancy: If you need an X-ray, always tell the hospital that you are pregnant. The doctor will help you decide whether the X-ray can wait until after pregnancy.
- Don't do any heavy lifting during pregnancy: If you need to move a larger object, it is better to pull it than to lift it. When lifting, bend your knees and keep your back straight to avoid back problems.



### ***“Ten Important Things”:***

Find medical help in the following situations:

- Excessive nausea and vomiting.
- Vaginal bleeding.
- Ruptured membranes: clear fluid draining from the vagina.
- Sustained severe abdominal pain.
- Sudden onset of oedema or severe oedema.
- Frontal headache, dizziness, visual disturbances.
- Palpitations and shortness of breath during activities.
- Baby moves much less than before or you no longer feel the baby move.
- You have diabetes, a heart or kidney disease and if symptoms have gotten worse since pregnancy.
- You're passed your due date ( $\geq 41$  weeks).

Please be aware that the information provided is intended solely for general educational and informational purposes only. It is neither intended nor implied to be a substitute for professional medical advice. Always seek the advice of your physician for any questions you may have regarding your medical condition. Never disregard professional medical advice or delay in seeking it because of something you have received in this program.