

# Can birth defects be prevented?

Birth defects can be devastating for parents and their baby. Sadly, many birth defects happen without an obvious cause and cannot be avoided. But, doctors know there are some things a woman can do before and during pregnancy to help lower the risk of birth defects. They include:

## **Take 400 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid every day.**

This is a B vitamin that can reduce the risk of certain brain and spine defects. Experts recommend taking it even before you get pregnant.

## **Get good medical care.**

See your doctor regularly and tell him or her if you plan to get pregnant.

Begin prenatal care as soon as possible after you become pregnant. It's important to talk about any health problems you may have and any medicines you take. You'll also need tests to check for high blood pressure, blood sugar, and other possible pregnancy problems. You may also need certain vaccines (shots) to prevent illness and avoid some birth defects.

## **Avoid alcohol, tobacco products, and any street drugs including marijuana.**

These can harm a developing baby.

## **Work toward a healthy weight.**

Overweight women have a higher risk of birth defects. Talk to your doctor about safe ways to achieve a healthy weight.

Ask your doctor how much weight you should gain during pregnancy.



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention