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# How to Stay Healthy and Low Risk During Pregnancy and Birth

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## Nutrition

If you did only 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 to 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 five servings of high-complex carbohydrates to ensure adequate calories for energy, as well as an additional source of protein. This would include whole grains that are not milled or processed, retaining the most nutrients, protein and fiber. Eating dairy, soy, nuts, 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 prevent premature labor and birth, toxemia, placental abruption, gestational diabetes, problems with breastfeeding and healing, and many other serious health problems that would place a mom in the high-risk category.

## 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 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.

## Education

Educating yourself with regard to all the issues involving pregnancy and birth will help you make responsible decisions that are right for you and your family. As the authors of *A Good Birth, A Safe Birth* say, "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 avoid unnecessary health risks common today in birth in the United States. 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*.

## Avoidance of Harmful Substances

Everyone knows you should avoid all street drugs during pregnancy so that your baby will not be harmed, but there are many other elements 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 drugs. According to the Physicians Desk Reference, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Food and Drug Administration, 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 care provider and checked to see if they are truly necessary during pregnancy, if there may be a safer medication or if a smaller dose might be appropriate. Before taking anything, you should always check with your care provider first.

### **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 care providers? 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 care providers. Choosing wisely the first time will create less stress in your life.

### **Choosing Your Birth Place Wisely**

When choosing where to have your baby, it is good to know that homebirths have been shown to be as safe as, 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.

### **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.

### **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.

Amy V. Haas, AAHCC, was trained and certified as a Bradley Method Childbirth Educator in 1995. Her educational history includes a bachelor of arts in sociology from Plattsburgh State University of New York, and a certification as a paralegal from Adelphi University in New York. For the past six years she has continually taught Bradley classes to pregnant families and empowered them to educate themselves to make healthy decisions that are right for them.

#### **Recommended Reading:**

- *The Birth Book*, by William Sears, MD, and 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 online at [www.kalico.net](http://www.kalico.net))
- *Natural Childbirth the Bradley Way*, by Susan McCutcheon
- *A Wise Birth*, by Armstrong and Feldman
- *A Good Birth, A Safe Birth*, by Korte and 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

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