

## PREGNANCY

# A healthier you can mean a healthier baby

**WHEN YOU'RE PREGNANT,** a lot of things that you do can have an effect on your baby – an effect that continues long after your baby is born.

That's why it's crucial to make good decisions about diet, exercise, health care and lifestyle habits during this important time.

The best way to take care of your baby is to take care of yourself.

"Physical and mental health are both important to consider before getting pregnant," says Allison Gibbs, MD, an Anchorage OB-GYN. "Planning your pregnancy and striving to be healthy before you conceive will increase your odds of having a normal pregnancy and a healthy baby."

### Prenatal care

Pregnant women who see a health care provider regularly have fewer problems during pregnancy and delivery and have healthier babies than women who don't get adequate prenatal care.

During your prenatal visits, your provider will talk with you about the best ways to give your baby a healthy start in life.

### Diet

Another way that you can take care of yourself and your baby is by following a healthy diet.

Aim to eat a low-fat diet filled with fruits, vegetables, whole grains, protein and calcium-rich foods.

In addition, you should avoid certain types of fish that may contain high levels of mercury, such as shark, swordfish, king mackerel and tilefish. Cook meat, eggs and fish thoroughly. Avoid unpasteurized milk and soft cheeses.

### Exercise

Following a regular exercise program during pregnancy may help labor and delivery go more smoothly, and being in good physical condition may make it easier to get back in shape after childbirth.

If you were exercising before you became pregnant, it's usually OK to continue. Ask your provider about which exercises are safe for you.

Your changing body can affect your balance and increase your risk of a fall. If you don't already exercise, start slowly and don't overdo it. Consider light exercises, such as

walking or swimming, unless your provider says otherwise.

### More healthy hints

The Office on Women's Health and other experts offer these tips:

- Do not smoke or use alcohol or illegal drugs during pregnancy.
- Talk to your provider about any medications or supplements you are taking.
- Limit coffee and other caffeinated drinks to one or two cups a day.
- Ask your provider how much weight you should gain.
- Be sure to get enough folic acid. To help prevent certain birth defects, pregnant women should get 400 to 800 micrograms of folic acid a day. Ask your provider about taking a multivitamin or prenatal vitamin.
- If there is a cat in your home, have



● Allison Gibbs, MD, OB-GYN

someone else change the litter box. This can help prevent toxoplasmosis, a disease that can seriously harm unborn babies.

**To learn more about prenatal care, visit [www.womenshealth.gov](http://www.womenshealth.gov).**

## A pleasant place for pregnancies

In October, Providence Alaska Medical Center will open a new Prenatal Unit, the next phase of the new Providence Maternity Center.

The 14-bed PNU is Alaska's only prenatal unit for high-risk pregnancies with dedicated nursing staff who specialize in care centered around moms and their families. A pregnancy may be considered high risk if a patient is carrying multiples, has a health issue before pregnancy or if complications developed during her pregnancy.

The new unit will feature rooms with private showers and bathrooms, Wi-Fi Internet, flat-screen televisions with cable,

DVD players, and a couch that converts into a guest bed.

The PNU will also offer space designated for families and support networks. This space will have the feel of a living room and will include dinner tables, couches, an entertainment system, and a washer and dryer for longer stays.

"It is essential we offer services that help support moms physically, spiritually, emotionally and socially," says Clinical Nurse Manager Cathy Heckenlively. "The unit was engineered with those four components in mind to provide a space for moms to have the best possible outcome."

The PNU is part of a multiyear expansion and modernization of the Maternity Center at The Children's Hospital at Providence scheduled for completion in fall 2014.