

Having a Healthy



Key 1. Take folic acid (folate) before and during pregnancy. *Why?*

Folic Acid is a B vitamin also known as folate. It helps a baby's neural tube to develop normally in the first 30 days and throughout pregnancy. Taking a multivitamin with 0.4 mg (400 mcg.) of folic acid *at least one month before getting pregnant and during the pregnancy* helps prevent birth defects of the baby's brain and spine leading to the inadequate development of the brain and/or the paralysis of the legs and feet.

Key 2. Don't smoke. *Why not?*

Infants of mothers who smoke may be born prematurely (too soon) or of low birth weight (less than 5 ½ pounds/less than 2500 grams); they have an increased risk of respiratory problems and of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS, crib death, muerte de cuna). Babies born too soon or too small have a greater chance of dying during the first year of life than babies born at full term or weighing more than 2500 grams.

Key 3. Don't drink alcohol. *Why not?*

Alcohol can affect the developing brain and nervous system. The effect ranges from moderate to severe mental disability as well as serious medical problems. As with smoking, drinking alcohol during pregnancy can result in a baby born too small or too soon.

Key 4. Avoid physical violence. *How?*

You may have to leave your husband or partner. The majority of physical abuse inflicted on new mothers in New Mexico in 1997-1998 was by a husband or partner. If there is a women's or crisis shelter in your area ask for help in finding a new place to live. If there is not a women's shelter available, ask the police/family/friends for help. Men who are physically violent with their partners are more likely to be sexually violent with them and are more likely to use violence toward children. Adults who saw violence or were the targets of violence when they were children are more likely to use violence as adults.

Key 5. Plan your pregnancy and have early and adequate prenatal care. *How?*

Use birth control (family planning) to prevent unwanted pregnancies. Women who are planning to have a pregnancy are more likely to neither smoke nor drink alcohol and seek health care for themselves and their baby than those whose pregnancies are unplanned. You may be eligible for assistance in obtaining family planning services and prenatal care. Women at 185 % of the Federal Poverty Line are Medicaid-eligible for prenatal care, two years of uninterrupted family planning services as well as WIC services for pregnant and breast-feeding women and infants. New Mexico's Families FIRST Case Management offers outreach and services for low-income mothers. For more information contact your local health department.

** The concept of the 5 keys and much of the content is based on the following report: Susan Nalder, May 20, 2000 Draft, Health Status Report 2000.*