



## Healthy Choices in Pregnancy

### A Healthy Start

Pregnancy is a very special time in a woman's life. Making healthy lifestyle choices before, during and after pregnancy will help a new baby get the best possible start in life.

### Healthy Eating

Healthy eating plays an important role in a healthy pregnancy. Eating nutritious foods from a variety of sources helps women get all the vitamins, minerals, and nutrients needed for healthy growth and development. It will also increase energy levels, improve your mood and self-image, and ensure appropriate weight gain (PHAC, 2008). *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide: First Nations, Inuit, and Métis* recommends that women who are pregnant or breastfeeding take a multivitamin every day that contains folic acid and iron (Health Canada, 2007).

### Physical Activity

Regular physical activity during pregnancy provides a number of benefits as well. It can promote better sleep, reduce stress, increase muscle tone, strength and endurance, help to build stamina for labour and delivery, and speed up post-delivery recovery (PHAC, 2008). If you have been inactive, it is important to start with mild activities such as walking and progress gradually (PHAC, 2008).

### Alcohol Use

There is no safe amount or safe time to drink alcohol during pregnancy. Alcohol use during any stage of pregnancy can increase the risk of miscarriage, premature delivery, stillbirth, and giving birth to a baby with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) (PHAC, 2008). FASD is an umbrella term to describe a range of harmful affects resulting from prenatal alcohol exposure, including physical deformities and life-long challenges in learning, behaviour, employment and socialization (BC Ministry of Health, 2005).

Making healthy choices in pregnancy has a lasting effect on the health and well-being of a woman, her infant, her family, and community.

### Tobacco and Other Substances

Using tobacco and recreational drugs (cannabis, cocaine, club drugs, opiates, etc.) during pregnancy can also increase the risk of negative birth outcomes, including low birth weight, sleep disturbances and other cognitive problems, miscarriage and premature delivery, and withdrawal symptoms at birth (Centre for Addictions and Mental Health, 2003).

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## fact sheet

Avoiding alcohol, tobacco and drugs during pregnancy is the best way to give a child a healthy start.

### Appropriate Care

Research suggests that Aboriginal-specific drug and alcohol programs for pregnant women need to 1) emphasize non-judgment and respect; 2) address determinants of health that contribute to poorer health outcomes and addiction; 3) follow a women and family centred approach to services; 4) ensure care is coordinated with other health and social services; 5) address issues of rurality and remoteness, particularly in the north; and 6) ensure programs are culturally-appropriate, community and strength-based (Clinesmith, 2007).

### For More Information

- ActNow BC  
[www.actnowbc.gov.bc.ca](http://www.actnowbc.gov.bc.ca)
- Baby's Best Chance  
[www.health.gov.bc.ca](http://www.health.gov.bc.ca)
- Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program  
[www.phac-aspc.gc.ca](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca)
- First Nations, Inuit and Aboriginal Health Branch, Health Canada  
[www.hc-sc.gc.ca](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca)
- Pregnancy Outreach Program  
[www.bcapop.ca](http://www.bcapop.ca)

### References

**BC Ministry of Health (2005).** Healthy Choices in Pregnancy: A Focus on Prenatal Alcohol Use. Background Paper. Victoria: BC Ministry of Health.

**Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (2003).** Is It Safe For My Baby? Toronto: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health.

**Clinesmith, Jennifer (2007).** Healthy Choices in Pregnancy for Aboriginal Peoples in British Columbia: An Analysis and Recommendations. BC Initiatives for Aboriginal Health.

**Public Health Agency of Canada (2008).** A Sensible Guide to Healthy Pregnancy. Ottawa: PHAC.



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