Plan for a healthy baby

Birth defects occur while a baby is growing during pregnancy. The most common are heart defects, cleft lip and palate, Down Syndrome and spina bifida. Causes may be genetic or related to infection or health behaviors during pregnancy.

You cannot change your genes, but you can make choices that enhance your likelihood of having a healthy baby and reduce the risk of his/her being born with health problems. Before becoming pregnant:

✦ Get a German measles (Rubella) vaccination.
✦ Begin taking a vitamin containing folic acid.
✦ Discuss with your doctor all prescription and over-the-counter medications you take.

While you are pregnant:

✦ Control any chronic medical conditions.
✦ Get early prenatal care, and go to every appointment.
✦ Do not smoke or use alcohol or recreational drugs.
✦ Avoid harmful chemicals, including many common products.
✦ Eat a healthy, balanced diet; avoid eating raw or undercooked meat and foods made from unpasteurized milk.

Sometimes, despite our best efforts, babies are born with different bodies or abilities. When that happens, we affirm their beauty as God’s gift to us. Faith communities are wonderful places for children with special needs to find validation and for their parents to get support.

Prayer: Dear God, be with parents who learn their children will have special challenges. Help them seek support from a loving community. Care for those who work so hard to treat and prevent birth defects. Amen.

Resources:
cdc.gov/pregnancy • jewishgeneticscenter.org • easylearn genetics.net
• Databases of interest: Dietary supplements.nlm.nih.gov/dietary;
  householdproducts.nlm.nih.gov/products.htm
The Cook County Department of Public Health has outstanding presentations for groups on this topic. If you are interested contact Jeanne Taverne at 708-786-4054.

Practical Guide to the Health Care System:
Where to go when you need medical treatment

Today there are several access points for someone who has been injured or is in need of immediate medical attention. Here is a brief guide through those options.

Hospital emergency department (ED): If you experience a sudden and serious illness or injury and need immediate care, call 911 or go the nearest emergency room. Hospitals provide 24-hour care. (Do not go to an ED if you do not have a life-threatening situation because you may delay treatment for someone needing emergency care and because insurance does not cover non-emergency care in an ED.) Contact your primary care physician as soon as you are treated. He/she will assist you with additional or follow up care and update your records.

Free-standing emergency department: These facilities, often satellites of hospitals, may not be open around the clock but are equipped with board-certified emergency medicine physicians and nurses and offer a full array of laboratory services and diagnostic tools.

Primary care physician: Having your own doctor who knows you and is familiar with your health history is very wise. Not only can such a physician treat you and direct you as illnesses and emergencies arise, this medical professional can also help you stay healthy, guide you to optimum wellness and help you keep current with vaccines, screenings, etc.

Medical clinics: Minor illnesses and injuries, skin treatments and vaccinations can be handled in a medical clinic, often located in the pharmacy of a chain store. Patients are seen on a first-come, first-served basis. Visits with the medical professional are usually brief. Patients may need to be over 2 years of age, and coverage for individual services varies by insurance provider.

Coming in February: The importance of a medical home