



#StandByHerHRI



# STAND BY HER

Tips to help the pregnant woman in your life have a healthy pregnancy

## **Seek the support of a healthcare professional around the pregnancy**

Having the support and advice of a healthcare professional from early in the pregnancy can lead to a healthier outcome for both mother and baby.

Encourage the pregnant woman in your life to tell a healthcare professional about the pregnancy as soon as possible. The mother can then be assessed for risks which may affect her, providing the best possible chance for early medical advice as well as recommended healthy lifestyle changes to help set the pregnancy on a positive pathway.

Providing moral support by accompanying the mother to appointments, as well as practical support such as transport, are other simple things you can do around healthcare visits.

## **Help start a “stop smoking” plan as soon as possible**

Smoking while pregnant can increase the

risk of a wide range of problems such as miscarriage and premature labour. It also doubles the chance of the baby being low weight at birth. Low birth weight babies have a higher chance of developing heart disease later in life, amongst other potential health problems.

If the mother needs extra support around quitting smoking, encourage her to seek advice from a healthcare professional, who can talk her through the help and assistance available.

## **Avoid alcohol**

Drinking while pregnant is linked to high blood pressure and gestational diabetes for the mother, while exposure of the baby to alcohol while in the womb can lead to damage to either brain or kidney development.

We strongly recommend that the mother not drink any alcohol during her pregnancy. One way you can support this is to plan social activities with the mother that do not involve alcohol.

## Review what you eat together

The mother's dietary requirements will change dramatically in pregnancy.

When planning meals together, whether cooking at home or eating out, choose healthy foods and meals. Make sure to include plenty of vegetables and moderate amounts of fruit, along with a healthy balance of protein, carbohydrate and fat. You can also seek advice from a doctor or dietitian for help in planning a balanced diet.

We do not recommend weight loss in pregnancy as it may be detrimental to the growth and development of the baby.

## Boost folate, iron and calcium levels

Folate is critical to preventing spina bifida in babies, so we recommend that all pregnant women take folate supplements for at least the first trimester, which is the first 12 weeks of pregnancy. The body uses iron to make extra blood for the mother and baby, and calcium is essential for the developing baby to build strong bones and teeth, as well as to grow a healthy heart, nerves and muscles.

For further advice, speak to a doctor on how to increase levels using supplements and foods rich in these nutrients.

## Plan gentle, appropriate exercise

Regular physical activity is an essential part of leading a heart-healthy lifestyle, and that doesn't change during pregnancy. If the mother has exercise activities she already enjoys, keep fit together by joining in, or choose one that you can both enjoy together. Her joints may be sorer and there will be changes to her energy levels, especially in the early stages of her pregnancy, so ensure the exercise you choose is appropriate. Both walking and swimming are popular, low-risk activities to help keep her moving.

## Plan the pregnancy with a medical professional

If the mother has existing conditions such as high blood pressure or diabetes and is already taking medications, we recommend speaking to a medical professional prior to conceiving. This will allow a review of any changes to medication that may be needed in the event of pregnancy, as well as provide the best chance to put a supportive monitoring plan in place.