

But I turned out okay....

Sometimes moms do dangerous things while they're pregnant. Occasionally they get lucky, and things turn out okay. Often times though - they don't.

Don't smoke. Smoking increases your risk of miscarriage and your baby's risk of birth defects, premature birth, low birth weight, and later learning disabilities. Smoking TRIPLES your baby's chance of dying of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. Babies of smokers are more likely to grow up to become smokers themselves.

Don't drink. There is no amount of alcohol that is safe at any stage of pregnancy. Alcohol can cause your baby to have abnormal facial features and problems with the brain or spinal cord. Drinking can lead to miscarriage, stillbirth, or Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASDS). FASDS can cause poor coordination, poor memory, attention difficulties, speech and language delays, low IQs, poor reasoning and judgment, vision and hearing problems, and problems with the heart, kidneys, and bones.

Are you struggling with an addiction to alcohol or nicotine? It's never too late to do your baby some good. Talk to your provider. There is help available.

Don't sauna. Or sit in the hot tub. Research indicates that overheating like this in the first trimester can double your risk of miscarriage.

Don't eat undercooked meat or eggs. They can cause illnesses that lead to birth defects or miscarriage.

Don't clean the cat's litter box. You could contract a parasite that causes miscarriage or stillbirth.

The First Trimester

Start Strong

Before you even know you're pregnant, monumental changes have begun to happen. The first months of development are when your baby is most vulnerable to damage, so the decisions that you make during this time can have life-long effects on your baby's health.



Do what you have to do to get the rest you need.

You're sleeping for two now! Let go of outside obligations; turn off the screens; take short naps if you need. It will make you feel better

now, and research indicates it could even pay off with a quicker labor.

Here are some choices that you can make right now that will help your baby be healthy in the future.

Start your prenatal visits as soon as possible. You'll have a thorough exam and some tests and screenings. This will help assess the health of you and your baby, and help you both to get off to a good start. Sawtooth Mountain Clinic recommends that your first visit happen when you're 8 - 10 weeks pregnant.

Take prenatal vitamins, even before you're pregnant. They can help prevent common and serious birth defects. Prenatal vitamins are cheap insurance if there's even an outside chance that you might be pregnant. (Are you a sexually active, menstruating female? Then you might be pregnant.)

Eat the rainbow - and we're not talking about Skittles. Veggies, fruits, and whole grains are full of the nutrition your body needs. After all, you're building an entire person (and an entire life-support system for that person) - from scratch! You need the very best building materials.

Drink plenty of water. While you may feel like you have to pee constantly, being well-hydrated can help with constipation, hemorrhoids, and even pre-term labor.

Stay active. Physical activity can help to smooth out some of the mood and hormonal changes, help you sleep better, and helps keep weight gain on track. If you weren't active before you were pregnant, talk with your provider first.

Get a flu shot. Pregnancy changes your immune system, and if you get the flu now you're more likely to experience complications, including preterm labor. The shot can even protect your baby from getting the flu after s/he is born.

Check in with your dentist. Pregnancy changes your whole body, including your teeth and gums. A dental check-up can help keep your mouth, and the rest of you, healthy. For more information about oral health and pregnancy, check out the North Shore Health Care Foundation's "Oral Health Task Force" <https://bit.ly/2sK716f>

Ask for help when you need it. Your body is working hard, so take it easy when you can. *Be kind to yourself.* You're going through some huge changes, even if you can't see them yet. For more information on your first trimester, visit: <https://bit.ly/2SmdPIC>

Taking care of ourselves can take a lot of support. We're here to help! Ask a nurse or provider if you'd like to talk.

“Low Birth Weight”

Can mean **BIG** problems for *tiny* babies.

Birth weight impacts more than just how much a baby weighs. Low birthweight can be a red flag for serious health issues, both at the time of birth and as the baby grows.

A baby is designated as being “low birthweight” if s/he weighs less than 5 pounds, 8 ounces at birth. The most common causes are premature birth or “fetal growth restriction.” Some babies can be small, but healthy. Many low birthweight babies, however, have trouble eating and gaining weight, and they can’t fight off infections.

Typically, they don’t have enough body fat and so have difficulty staying warm.

Some other common struggles that these babies face are:

- **Breathing problems**, such as “infant respiratory distress syndrome” (a respiratory disease caused by being born prematurely and having immature lungs)
- **Neurologic problems**, such as intraventricular hemorrhage (bleeding inside the brain)
- **Gastrointestinal problems**, such as necrotizing enterocolitis (a serious disease of the intestine common in premature babies)
- **Retinopathy of prematurity**. The retina (the back part of the eyeball) doesn’t fully develop, and left untreated, this can quickly lead to blindness.
- **Jaundice** is caused by the baby’s liver not working properly. If severe or untreated, it can lead to brain damage.
- **Sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS)**
- **Low oxygen levels at birth**

Almost all low birthweight babies have to go to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) until they are bigger. Survival is greatly impacted by birthweight; the smaller the baby, the lower the chances that they’ll make it.

Low birthweights can also affect babies later in their lives. They may be more likely to develop:

- Diabetes
- Heart Disease
- High Blood Pressure
- Obesity
- Metabolic Syndrome (having high blood pressure, diabetes, and heart disease all at the same time.)
- Intellectual and developmental disabilities - issues with the way that the brain works that can cause them to have problems with physical development, learning, communicating, being able to take care of him/herself, or difficulty in getting along well with other people.

Risk factors and ways to reduce them. Some things make it more likely that your baby will be born at a low birth weight.

- **Preterm labor** - the chances of this happening can be reduced by getting good prenatal care and not smoking.
- **Chronic health conditions** such as high blood pressure, diabetes, or heart, lung, or kidney problems. Work closely with your doctor to help avoid complications.
- **Some medications.** If you take medication, talk to your doctor to make sure that it’s safe during pregnancy.
- **Infections.** Some infections (such as chicken pox, rubella, sexually transmitted diseases, etc.) can slow your baby’s growth while you’re pregnant. Make sure your vaccinations are up-to-date before you become pregnant, avoid infectious agents whenever possible, and contact your health care provider right away if you do come into contact with one.
- **Not gaining enough weight.** If you have, or ever have had, an eating disorder, talk with your provider. Together you can plan to make sure that you and your baby are getting enough of the right kinds of food.
- **Smoking, drinking, using street drugs, or misusing prescription drugs.** All of these can slow your baby’s growth and increase the risk of both premature birth and birth defects.

For more information, visit www.marchofdimes.org .