



Perinatal e-News

LA BEST BABIES NETWORK
Healthy Babies. Our Future.
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- **Preconception and Interconception Care Reduces Risk of Heart Defects**
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Preconception and Interconception Care Reduces Infant Risk of Congenital Heart Defects

This year in California an estimated 550,000 babies will be born. Unfortunately, some of these babies will face a difficult future:

- more than 17,000 will be born with birth defects
- approximately 1,250 will have major heart defects
- approximately 1,600 infants with birth defects will die before age one.

According to the American Heart Association, congenital cardiovascular defects are the most common birth defects in newborns. Most congenital heart defects cannot be prevented; however, women of childbearing age and those planning a pregnancy can make simple life changes before conception that will help reduce their risk of giving birth to an infant with a heart defect.

In observance of **Congenital Heart Defect Awareness Week, February 7-14**, LA Best Babies Network encourages women of childbearing age and those planning a pregnancy to:

- have a preconception visit with their healthcare provider and obtain prenatal care after conception
- be screened for diabetes, rubella and influenza
- take a daily multivitamin containing 400 micrograms of folic acid
- review the use of medications (prescribed or over-the-counter) with their healthcare provider
- avoid alcohol, tobacco and illicit drugs.

The preconception and interconception (time between pregnancies) periods are crucial to reducing many of the risks of birth defects.

At the preconception visit, women can be screened for chronic diseases such as diabetes. Women who have diabetes have a higher risk of having a child with a heart defect. A woman who manages her diabetes before and during pregnancy reduces her risk of having a baby with a congenital heart defect, among other birth defects.

For women diagnosed with gestational diabetes, the Network promotes guidelines from Sweet Success-California Diabetes and Pregnancy Program and American Diabetes Association which recommend that healthcare providers screen for type 2 diabetes at six weeks postpartum and repeat the test annually. In the postpartum period and beyond, healthcare providers can work with women to develop an appropriate exercise plan, control blood sugar levels and maintain a healthy weight.

For more information on diabetes during pregnancy, view the Network's brief on "[Gestational Diabetes](#)."

Learn more about **Congenital Heart Defect Awareness Week**. Visit the Congenital Heart Information Network <http://tchin.org/aware/>

Pregnancy and American Heart Month

Did you know that approximately 1 percent of pregnant women will have complications due to heart disease? Pregnancy places a considerable demand on the heart, forcing it to work harder than a heart of a non-pregnant woman. A woman with a pre-existing heart problem needs special care before, during and after pregnancy to reduce her risk of complications.

It is recommended that women with pre-existing heart disease talk with their healthcare provider about planning a pregnancy. LA Best Babies Network encourages these women to obtain genetic counseling. Women who have congenital heart disease are at a higher risk of having a baby with some type of heart defect.

Also, women without pre-existing heart disease may be at risk of developing heart-related conditions such as gestational hypertension (high blood pressure in pregnancy), preeclampsia (high blood pressure that is accompanied by protein in the urine), and blood clots. Women who have a pre-existing heart condition or develop one during pregnancy are recommended to seek the care of a perinatologist (a doctor trained in obstetrics and gynecology who specializes in the care of high-risk pregnancies) and a cardiologist. Obtaining good prenatal care increases a woman's likelihood of having a healthy pregnancy and birth.

LA Best Babies Network joins the American Heart Association in raising awareness of heart disease in **February** during **American Heart Month**. Women can take easy steps to achieve a healthy pregnancy and birth by

obtaining proper health care and monitoring their heart before, during and after conception.

To learn more about heart disease, visit the [American Heart Association's](#) Web site.

Visit our Web [News & Events](#) section.

We invite you to contribute story ideas and event listings for our consideration in *Perinatal e-News*. To submit items please e-mail contact@labestbabies.org.

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