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Holy Redeemer physician offers five “Do’s and Don’ts” for a healthy pregnancy

(MEADOWBROOK, PA) – Of the estimated six million women who become pregnant each year in the U.S., more than one million engage in unhealthy behaviors – such as smoking, drinking alcohol and abusing drugs.*

Because unhealthy behaviors can result in complications for women and their unborn children, Dr. May-Ange Ntoso says that it’s critically important that women take care of themselves – from the first to the fortieth week of pregnancy.

“A woman’s behavior during pregnancy can have a profound impact on her health and the health of her baby,” says Dr. Ntoso, an obstetrician and gynecologist at Holy Redeemer Hospital and Medical Center. “Unhealthy behaviors such as smoking and drinking alcohol can cause miscarriage, stillbirth, low birth-weight, prematurity and developmental delays. That’s why it’s vital that pregnant women do all they can to stay healthy.”

Dr. Ntoso says that staying healthy not only means eating right but avoiding potential risks as well. “When you’re pregnant, what you *don’t* put into your body is as important as what you do,” she says.

Dr. Ntoso offers the following five “do’s and don’ts” for a healthy pregnancy:

Do’s

Prenatal care – Throughout a pregnancy, prenatal care will help manage both the baby’s and the mother’s health. Regular visits to a healthcare provider are an opportunity to talk about lifestyle, family health history, medications (over-the-counter, natural supplements and prescription), as well as existing medical conditions, such as diabetes and high blood pressure.

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Nutrition – Pregnant women need about 300 extra calories a day. A well-balanced diet that includes lean meats, fruits, dairy and vegetables contributes to baby’s growth and development.

Folic acid – Pregnant women and those who are planning a pregnancy should get about 800 micrograms (0.8 milligrams) of folic acid every day. That can be from a multivitamin or a folic acid supplement. Taking folic acid decreases the risk of certain types of defects in a developing fetus by up to 70 percent.

Exercise – Pregnant women should get at least 30 minutes of physical activity four times a week. Activities such as walking, swimming, yoga and Pilates are ideal because they are low-impact and work on strength, flexibility and relaxation.

Sleep – Pregnant women should get at least eight hours of sleep each night. Sleep reduces stress and gives the body the rest it needs to nurture a developing baby. It’s also recommended that pregnant women sleep on their left side. This helps keep the uterus off large organs and optimizes blood flow to the placenta.

Don’ts:

Alcohol – To date, it has not been determined what a “safe amount” of alcohol is. Studies show that alcohol use during pregnancy is a major risk factor for low-birth weight babies and birth defects, which is why pregnant women should abstain from alcohol altogether.

Drugs – Pregnant women who use drugs put their babies at risk for premature birth, poor growth, birth defects, and behavior and learning problems. Their babies could also be born addicted to the drugs themselves.

Nicotine – Studies show that smoking mothers pass nicotine and carbon monoxide onto their babies. These children can develop asthma and are at a greater risk for Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). If you smoke, talk to your healthcare provider about options for kicking the habit.

Caffeine – Coffee, teas and colas all contain caffeine. Because high caffeine consumption has been linked to an increased risk of miscarriage, it’s best to limit or avoid caffeine altogether. Try switching to decaffeinated products or caffeine-free alternatives.

Food-borne illnesses – Food-borne illnesses, such as listeriosis and toxoplasmosis, can be life-threatening to an unborn baby and may cause birth defects or miscarriage. Foods to steer clear of during pregnancy include unpasteurized milk, cheeses, juices, and apple cider; raw eggs or undercooked meats, fish (sushi) or shellfish; and processed deli meats.

*American Pregnancy Association