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## **Pre-Pregnancy Planning a Priority for Women with Chronic Conditions**

(MEADOWBROOK, PA) – In the past, women with chronic diseases such as high blood pressure, diabetes or seizure disorders were often discouraged from having children. But today, motherhood is possible for many of these women thanks to careful planning and monitoring, according to a Holy Redeemer physician.

“Most of the body’s major organs have to work harder or differently during pregnancy,” says Dr. Patrice Trauffer, a maternal fetal medicine specialist with Holy Redeemer Hospital and Medical Center. “Most healthy women are able to adjust to these changes without difficulty. In women with chronic medical conditions, however, the disease may affect the body’s ability to adapt.”

That is why Trauffer says that pre-pregnancy planning is the most important step a woman with a chronic condition can take to ensure a healthy pregnancy.

“Long before you conceive, talk to your doctor about what you can do to make your pregnancy safe and your baby healthy,” says Trauffer. “For instance, the type of medications you use, or the dose, may need to be changed before conception. And in certain situations where the underlying condition may affect the baby’s development, talk to your doctor about ways to more carefully control the disease prior to conception. Doing so can improve the chances of having a healthy baby.”

Trauffer offers tips for women with the following chronic medical conditions:

- **Diabetes:** In women who are already diabetic, controlling blood sugar during pregnancy is more difficult because of placental hormones and the nutritional needs of the fetus. But with careful control of blood sugar and diet throughout pregnancy, women can reduce risks to themselves and their baby.

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- **Asthma:** The effects of asthma on pregnancy vary. A mother's asthma may improve, stay the same, or for about a third of women, become worse. The fetus can be harmed if an asthma attack greatly reduces the oxygen content in the blood. For most women, however, there is usually no increased risk to the fetus if their asthma is controlled with medications. Women with asthma can help their babies by getting into the best physical shape possible before conception, avoiding any asthma triggers and reviewing all medications with their doctor.
- **High blood pressure and heart disease:** Since high blood pressure increases the risk of placental complications, this condition should be brought under control before conceiving. Most patients with mild high blood pressure do well and have healthy infants. For women with heart disease, the actual risk depends on the type and severity of the particular disease. Women with heart disease should consult their cardiologist to determine if the severity of the disease will allow for a pregnancy and childbirth.
- **Epilepsy:** Although the vast majority of women with epilepsy deliver healthy babies, they are at higher risk than women without the disease. To ensure an uncomplicated pregnancy, women should make certain that their care is closely coordinated between their neurologist and obstetrician.
- **Cancer:** As treatments have improved in recent decades, more and more people are surviving cancer. In addition, newer treatments have been gentler on the preservation of fertility. Having had cancer in the past does not rule out pregnancy. Women who have had cancer and are considering having a child should speak with their physician regarding their prognosis and how long they should wait before becoming pregnant. The discussion should include the possibility of recurrence and any other health-related matter that could be exacerbated by pregnancy.

Trauffer recommends that all women who are planning to become pregnant, regardless of their health, get about 400 micrograms of folic acid every day starting three months before pregnancy and during early pregnancy. That can be from a multivitamin or a folic acid supplement. Taking folic acid decreases the risk of a certain type of serious birth defect in a developing fetus by up to 70 percent.

To make an appointment with a Holy Redeemer obstetrician or maternal fetal specialist, or for more information about Holy Redeemer programs, call 1-800-818-4747 or visit [www.yourebeautifulbaby.com](http://www.yourebeautifulbaby.com).