

Healthy Pregnancy Outcomes- Topic of the Month

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Approximately 62,000 babies are born in Minnesota every year, and more than one in four births involve families who participate in WIC. For many, WIC is their first stop after finding out they are pregnant. By enrolling early, families can get nutritious foods, practical nutrition education, breastfeeding support, and connections to community resources that support a healthy pregnancy and give the baby the best possible start.

Steps to a healthy pregnancy

- **Healthy Habits:** Start healthy habits, annual health check-ups, and folic acid supplementation before pregnancy.
- **Health Care:** Begin prenatal care early in the pregnancy and maintain regular healthcare visits.
- **Eat Well:** Follow a healthy diet with a balance of nutrient-dense foods.
- **Weight Changes:** Achieve a healthy rate of gain for the pregnancy and maintain a healthy weight between pregnancies.
- **Movement:** Maintain appropriate physical activity before, during, and after pregnancy.
- **Prenatal Vitamins:** Take prenatal vitamin supplements that contain iron, folic acid, and iodine daily.
- **Harmful Substances:** Avoid use of alcohol and nicotine, illegal drug use, abuse of prescription drugs, and exposure to toxic substances.
- **Pregnancy Spacing:** Follow recommendations for healthy pregnancy spacing and avoid unintended pregnancies.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), [Health E-Stat 100: Maternal Mortality Rates in the United States, 2023](#), just over 800 women in the United States died that year from pregnancy or delivery complications. Most of these deaths were preventable!

CDC created the [HEAR HER Campaign](#) to promote the prevention of pregnancy-related deaths by raising awareness, providing supportive tools, and empowering all women to reach out and save lives. The campaign also hopes to encourage family members, caregivers, and providers to support pregnant and postpartum women by listening and acting when something doesn't feel right. Understanding risk is the first step to making an impact.

Risk factors

Below is a list of risk factors that may increase the risk of a poor pregnancy outcome. This list is not all-inclusive.

- **Existing Health Conditions:** Hypertension, diabetes, obesity, HIV/AIDs, and heart, thyroid, or kidney disease.
- **Age:** Teen pregnancy or first-time pregnancy over 35.
- **Race:** Black and Indigenous women have 2-3 times the increased risk of pregnancy-related mortality.
- **Lifestyle Factors:** Lack of a healthy diet and exercise, and low-income status.
- **Mental health:** Depression, anxiety, and substance abuse.
- **Condition of Pregnancy:** Gestational diabetes, pre-eclampsia, multiple gestation, previous birth complications, birth defects, or genetic conditions.
- **Healthcare:** Lack of adequate and consistent healthcare services before, during, and after pregnancy.

Building healthy habits through education

No one organization can address all the issues that a family may face. They say it takes a village to raise a child, and in this case, support starts with learning how to educate families.

- [Healthy People 2030- Pregnancy and Childbirth](#) created related objectives intended to prevent pregnancy complications and maternal deaths and improve women's health before, during, and after pregnancy. The objectives include strategies to help all women develop healthy habits and to encourage regular medical care throughout their lives. Women in the United States have a greater risk of maternal death when compared to other high-income countries. Intervention is essential in reducing health disparities, ensuring health equity, and improving the overall health and well-being of all women.
- [Why 1,000 Days](#) highlights the first 1,000 days as a window of opportunity to create brighter futures for all families, the window begins at the start of a woman's pregnancy and goes until the second year of life. Nutrition plays a key role in child development, and this

project's work focuses on improving the health of mothers, babies, and toddlers across the U.S.

- The [Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2025–2030](#), recognize the importance of nutrition in pregnancy and lactation by highlighting key nutrients to support infant growth and development and maintain the mother's health. The past [Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2020-2025](#) dedicated chapter five to call out specific dietary patterns for women who are pregnant or lactating and included a special consideration to healthy weight status throughout the various stages of a woman's life.

WIC makes a difference

Numerous studies have shown that participation in WIC is associated with longer gestations, higher birth rates, and healthier infants. Supporting WIC participants begins with understanding their individual needs and offering the appropriate education and referrals. WIC can help support healthy pregnancy outcomes by encouraging both parents to build a healthy attachment to the developing fetus from the start.

Assessment and education tips:

- Explore the participant's feelings about pregnancy and changes in the body.
- Assess stressors that can affect pregnancy; does the participant have a safe place to stay, access to healthy foods, adequate medical care, and social support?
- Explore the need for referrals and resources for access to services as appropriate, based on an individualized need.
- Encourage healthy habits for pregnancy and explore thoughts on how the baby is developing at different stages.
- Encourage both parents to connect with the fetus; read to, talk to, and touch the belly.
- Read notes and alerts from the last appointment at return visits; follow up on any concerns that may have been discussed in the past.

Participant centered

By using [PCS Counseling Skills](#), we are better able to tailor education and referrals. Staying informed and practicing skills will aid in your ability to provide evidence-based information to participants in a supportive way. Staff may use tools developed specifically to hone their skills in counseling and educating pregnant women.

Tools to Review:

- [Training Tool for Pregnant Woman Assessment Questions \(PDF\)](#)
- [Nutrition Modules](#): Maternal/Child/Infant Nutrition Modules

- [WIC Nutrition and Your Family](#) (Education cards): Pregnancy, Breastfeeding, and General Nutrition Education cards.

IMPORTANT: Early and adequate access to healthcare matters! Any woman who discovers they are pregnant or wishes to become pregnant should be encouraged to seek out the care of a healthcare professional who can monitor their health status before, during, and after pregnancy.

Staff Training Suggestion

Group Activity

- **Review:** Read through the list of [Healthy People 2030, Pregnancy and Childbirth](#) related objectives.
- **Discuss:** Break into small groups and pick one objective each to discuss the impact WIC has on working to meet this goal. Click to open the objective and read through the “**Summary**”.
 - Consider the ways that education and counseling can help to support meeting the goal.
 - Consider the resources WIC may share to offer additional support to parents.
- **Share:** Return to the larger group and share the chosen objective and summarize the group discussion.

No group, no problem

- **Review:** Read through the list of [Healthy People 2030, Pregnancy and Childbirth](#) related objectives.
- **Choose:** Pick 2 to 3 of the baseline objectives. Click to open the objective and read through the “**Summary**”.
 - Consider the ways that education and counseling can help to support meeting the goal.
 - Consider the resources WIC may share to offer additional support to parents.
- **Share:** Contact a co-worker or friend to discuss the chosen objectives and any thoughts generated.

References- complete listing of hyperlinks:

[Health E-Stat 100: Maternal Mortality Rates in the United States, 2023](https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/hestat/maternal-mortality/2023/maternal-mortality-rates-2023.htm)

(<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/hestat/maternal-mortality/2023/maternal-mortality-rates-2023.htm>)

[HEAR HER Campaign](https://www.cdc.gov/hearher/index.html) (<https://www.cdc.gov/hearher/index.html>)

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[Healthy People 2030- Pregnancy and Childbirth](https://odphp.health.gov/healthypeople/objectives-and-data/browse-objectives/pregnancy-and-childbirth)

(<https://odphp.health.gov/healthypeople/objectives-and-data/browse-objectives/pregnancy-and-childbirth>)

[Why 1,000 Days](https://thousanddays.org/why-1000-days/) (<https://thousanddays.org/why-1000-days/>)

[Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2025–2030](https://cdn.realfood.gov/DGA.pdf) (<https://cdn.realfood.gov/DGA.pdf>)

[Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2020-2025](https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/sites/default/files/2020-12/Dietary_Guidelines_for_Americans_2020-2025.pdf)

(https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/sites/default/files/2020-12/Dietary_Guidelines_for_Americans_2020-2025.pdf)

[Food and Nutrition](https://dcyf.mn.gov/individuals-and-families/basic-needs/food-and-nutrition) (<https://dcyf.mn.gov/individuals-and-families/basic-needs/food-and-nutrition>)

[WIC Program](https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/index.html) (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/index.html>)

[PCS Counseling Skills](https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/training/pcs/skills/counseling.html)

(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/training/pcs/skills/counseling.html>)

[Training Tool for Pregnant Woman Assessment Questions](https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/training/pcs/assessment/pregnant.pdf)

(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/training/pcs/assessment/pregnant.pdf>)

[Nutrition Modules](https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/training/nutmodules.html)

(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/training/nutmodules.html>)

[WIC Nutrition and Your Family](https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/nutrition/tips.html#NaN)

(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/nutrition/tips.html#NaN>)

Minnesota Department of Health - WIC Program, 625 Robert St. N, PO BOX 64975, ST PAUL, MN 55164-0975; 1-800-657-3942, health.wic@state.mn.us, www.health.state.mn.us; to obtain this information in a different format, call: 1-800-657-3942.

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