

# **SiHF Healthcare Offers Birth Defect Prevention Tips For Women Pre-pregnancy And During**

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ALTON - As January is National Birth Defects Awareness Month, SIHF Healthcare wants to emphasize the importance of women's health before and during pregnancy to help reduce potential birth defects.

“While not all birth defects can be prevented, there are certain steps one can take prior to and during pregnancy to increase their chances of having a healthy pregnancy and

baby,” said Tia Britton, Healthy Start Program Coordinator for Education and Outreach at SIHF Healthcare.

Here are some tips:

**Get 400 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid every day.** Folic Acid is a B vitamin that helps to prevent birth defects of the brain and spine, also known as Neural Tube Defects (NTDS). Folic acid is found in fortified foods or supplements. Examples of foods rich in folate are beans, citrus fruits, whole grains, meat such as turkey and chicken or vegetables such as spinach or darky leafy greens. Folate is also found in processed foods. These foods are labeled as enriched with folic acid. Examples include whole breads, pastas, flours and cereals.

**Prevent infections.** Some infections that a woman might get during pregnancy can be harmful to the developing baby and can even cause birth defects. Tell your medical provider right away if you think that you might have an infection or have been exposed to one.

**See a healthcare professional regularly.** Be sure to see a doctor when planning a pregnancy and start prenatal care as soon as you find out that you are pregnant. Make sure to keep all prenatal care appointments because they are monitoring the health of you and your baby.

**Talk to a healthcare provider about taking any medications.** Certain medications can cause serious birth defects when taken during pregnancy. Talk with your healthcare provider before stopping or starting any medications. This includes over the counter drugs and supplements.

**Talk to a healthcare provider about vaccinations (shots).** Most vaccines are safe during pregnancy and some, such as the flu vaccine and Tdap are specifically recommended during pregnancy. COVID-19 vaccination is recommended for people who are pregnant, breastfeeding, trying to get pregnant now or might become pregnant in the future. If you have questions about getting vaccinated, talk with your healthcare provider.

**Avoid alcohol at any time during pregnancy.** Alcohol use during pregnancy can cause miscarriage, stillbirth and a range of disabilities. All types of alcohol can be harmful to consume during pregnancy, including all wines and beer.

**Avoid smoking cigarettes and exposure to smoke.** Smoking during pregnancy can cause preterm birth, certain birth defects (cleft lip or cleft palate) and infant death. If you need help quitting, please speak with your medical provider or a member of the Healthy Start team.

**Avoid marijuana and other drugs.** Marijuana use during pregnancy may be linked to lower birth weight in infants. Women using marijuana for medical reasons should speak with their healthcare provider about an alternative therapy that's safer for pregnant women.

“Pregnancy is an exciting time, but it can also be stressful. Knowing you are doing all you can to prepare for a healthy pregnancy and baby, can not only give your baby a great start but give you peace of mind,” noted Britton.

The Healthy Start team at SIHF Healthcare is here to connect mothers with a medical provider and others who can answer any questions regarding their pregnancy. Healthy Start also provides patients with continual encouragement and support at every stage in their pregnancy and as they care for their newborn. To see how they can help you, visit <https://www.sihf.org/patient-care-services/care-coordination-services/healthy-start> or call 618-646-2505.

### ***About SIHF Healthcare***

*SIHF Healthcare operates a network of 30 health centers across 11 Illinois counties with more than 140 medical providers who deliver comprehensive healthcare services including: adult, family, women's health, pediatrics, dental services for children, behavioral health, and population health services. As one of the largest Federally Qualified Health Center networks in the country, SIHF Healthcare is devoted to leading individuals and communities to their healthiest lifestyle regardless of their ability to pay. For more information or to find the nearest provider, visit [www.sihf.org](http://www.sihf.org).*