

Preconception the key to healthy babies

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New U.S. recommendations say a woman must make changes long before she becomes pregnant to better ensure her baby will be born healthy, a report said.

The recommendations from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention were written with help from the March of Dimes and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists.

"Preconception care isn't just about the baby," Dr. Peter Bernstein, a CDC panelist, told USA Today. "It's also about achieving health for the mother."

The recommendations say women should address weight, diet, habit and medication issues long before they become pregnant.

While 85 percent of U.S. women receive health services after becoming pregnant, less than 25 percent do so before their pregnancy.

The next step, said the CDC's Hani Arrash, is better defining specific elements of preconception care.

"We really want to go beyond the simple, obvious thing," such as telling women to stop smoking, Arrash told the newspaper.

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