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## Things You Need To Know About Birth Defects

### 1. Did you know that birth defects are common?

➤ **Fact:** Birth defects affect 1 in 33 babies every year and cause 1 in 5 infant deaths. For many babies born with a birth defect, there is no family history of the condition.

### 2. Did you know that a woman should take folic acid during her teens and throughout her life?

➤ **Fact:** Because half of all pregnancies in the United States are not planned, all women who can become pregnant should take a vitamin with folic acid every day. Folic acid helps a baby's brain and spine develop very early in the first month of pregnancy when a woman might not know she is pregnant.

### 3. Did you know that many birth defects are diagnosed after a baby leaves the hospital?

➤ **Fact:** Many birth defects are not found immediately at birth. A birth defect can affect how the body looks, how it works, or both. Some birth defects like cleft lip or spina bifida are easy to see. Others, like heart defects, are not.

### 4. Did you know that some birth defects can be diagnosed before birth?

➤ **Fact:** Tests like an ultrasound and amniocentesis can detect birth defects such as spina bifida, heart defects, or Down syndrome before a baby is born. Prenatal care and screening are important because early diagnosis allows families to make decisions and plan for the future.

### 5. Did you know that birth defects can greatly affect the finances not only of the families involved, but of everyone?

➤ **Fact:** In the United States, birth defects have accounted for over 139,000 hospital stays during a single year, resulting in \$2.6 billion in hospital costs alone. Families and the government share the burden of these costs. Additional costs due to lost wages or occupational limitations can affect families as well.



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### 6. Did you know that birth defects can be caused by many different things, not just genetics?

▶ **Fact:** The cause of most birth defects is unknown. Use of cigarettes, alcohol, and other drugs, taking of some medicines; and exposure to chemicals and infectious diseases during pregnancy have been linked to birth defects. Researchers are studying the role of these factors, as well as genetics, as causes of birth defects.

### 7. Did you know that some birth defects can be prevented?

▶ **Fact:** A woman can take some important steps before and during pregnancy to help prevent birth defects. She can take folic acid; have regular medical checkups; make sure medical conditions, such as diabetes, are under control; have tests for infectious diseases and get necessary vaccinations; and not use cigarettes, alcohol, or other drugs.

### 8. Did you know there are ways a pregnant woman can keep her unborn baby safe from infections?

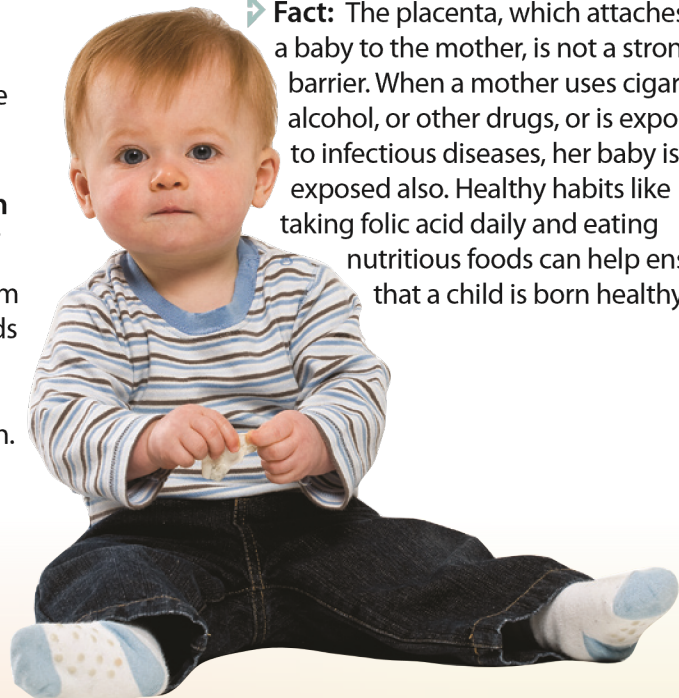
▶ **Fact:** The best way to keep an unborn baby safe from infections is for a pregnant woman to wash her hands often, especially after using the bathroom; touching raw meat, uncooked eggs, or unwashed vegetables; handling pets; gardening; or caring for small children.

### 9. Did you know there is no known safe amount of alcohol or safe time to drink during pregnancy?

▶ **Fact:** Fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASDs) are a group of conditions that can occur in a person whose mother drank alcohol during pregnancy. These effects can include physical problems and problems with behavior and learning which can last a lifetime. There is no known safe amount, no safe time, and no safe type of alcohol to drink during pregnancy. FASDs are 100% preventable if a woman does not drink alcohol while pregnant.

### 10. Did you know that an unborn child is not always protected from the outside world?

▶ **Fact:** The placenta, which attaches a baby to the mother, is not a strong barrier. When a mother uses cigarettes, alcohol, or other drugs, or is exposed to infectious diseases, her baby is exposed also. Healthy habits like taking folic acid daily and eating nutritious foods can help ensure that a child is born healthy.



To find out more about birth defects and healthy pregnancies, please visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website [www.cdc.gov/pregnancy](http://www.cdc.gov/pregnancy) or call your state or local health department.

