

We in Sri Lanka, have limited facilities for diagnosing birth defects in babies before they are born. Some birth defects may be detected during a pregnancy when performing an ultrasound scan, but even then, our law does not permit doctors to perform abortions to terminate such pregnancies even if the parents want it.

If you are planning to have a baby, then you and your partner should visit a doctor. The doctor will find out from you about your health and past pregnancies so that he/she is able to advise you accordingly on the treatment of existing health problems and/or a change in lifestyle that may be needed before and during the pregnancy. This advice given before the baby is conceived is called **Preconception Counselling**. Viewed in the context of the pregnancy this is the most important health care visit. This is also the time for the couple to discuss other concerns that they may have including family planning.



**If you depend on the crystal ball**

### **Why is this visit so important ?**

The most crucial stages in your baby's development occur during the first few weeks after the baby is conceived. This is before you miss your first menstrual period, and before you have developed other signs of pregnancy.

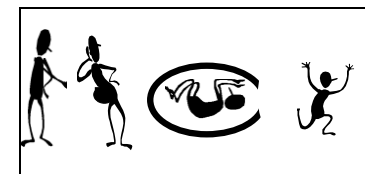
During this period the baby is most sensitive to outside effects like infections, radiation, drugs, alcohol, medicines, and environmental chemicals to which the mother is exposed. Therefore, unless you have planned your pregnancy and taken precautions to avoid them, you may cause serious harm to your unborn baby without even realising it.



### **As a couple planning to have a baby have you given any thought to the following ?**

- Are we committed to supporting each other during and after the pregnancy?
- Have we selected efficient, kind and understanding doctors to give advice before, during and after the pregnancy?
- Have we both had a complete medical examination, including basic blood and urine investigations?
- If we do have a medical or surgical problem, has it being adequately treated, controlled or surgically attended to?
- Have we had our ABO & Rh blood groups determined?
- Have we had advice on our sexual habits during pregnancy and the use and termination of contraceptives before pregnancy?

- Have we had advice on our social life styles, participation in sports or exercise ?
- Have I (mother to be) had a complete dental examination?
- Have I (mother to be) been immunized for Rubella and Tetanus and had a VDRL test done?
- Have I (mother to be) had advice on general body hygiene, skin and breast care?
- Have I (mother to be) had advice on the importance of having regular meals and on the eating and drinking of fresh, uncontaminated (microbe and chemical free) nutritive foods?
- Am I (mother to be) on a regular dose of folic acid.



### **If you follow these simple instructions**

- Am I (mother to be), specifically during pregnancy, and particularly in its first three months, taking care to avoid :
  - Food and drink with preservatives, additives, dyes, and other chemicals.
  - Food and drink whose preparation or source of packaging is in doubt.
  - Medication - western and indigenous.
  - Alcohol and other narcotics.

- Smoking - active and passive.
  - Visiting hospitals or making contact with persons carrying infections.
  - Domestic pets like dogs, cats and birds.
  - Handling raw meat.
  - The use of excessive cosmetics including hair dyes.
  - The ingestion of agricultural chemicals through food, drink or direct contact.
  - Public swimming pools, saunas and hot water pools or baths.
  - Exposure to X-rays or any other form of radiological investigation or radiation of any form in the home or work place.
- Have I (father to be) taken sufficient precautions not to be exposed to an unhealthy working environment ?
  - Have I (father to be) taken steps to ensure that my wife will not be exposed to passive smoking ?
  - Have I (father to be) taken steps to cut down on the consumption of alcohol and to change any other unhygienic and undesirable habits ?

**HUMAN GENETICS UNIT  
GENETIC AWARENESS PROGRAMME  
(GAP)**

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**SEEK  
Preconception  
Counselling  
To  
AVOID  
Birth Defects  
and  
HAVE  
Healthy Babies**

**Where should you go for  
PRECONCEPTION COUNSELLING ?**

Because your family doctor knows you and your family, he is the best person to consult for preconception counselling. If you do not have a family doctor or you want another opinion, then visit the HUMAN GENETICS UNIT of the Faculty of Medicine - Colombo.

**Facts YOU Should Know**

