News Release
Thursday 18 December 2008

Expectant mothers: Go direct to midwife

Expectant mothers should make contact with a community midwife as soon as their pregnancy is confirmed - that's the message from Julia Austin, consultant midwife in public health at the University Hospitals, Leicester.

“Many women think that they should see a midwife when their pregnancy is advanced, but I urge them to access the community midwifery service as soon as they know they are pregnant.” Julia said.

“Midwives can help women with their health and social care needs. They can also support them during the transition to parenthood by preparing them for the physical and emotional changes they will experience”

As soon as a woman knows she is pregnant, she should call her local GP practice to make contact with a community midwife. Groups of community midwives cover specific areas and each pregnant woman is allocated a named midwife from their local group.

Women who don’t see a midwife until later in pregnancy may miss out on important tests and treatment to support good health at this time. For example, blood tests for anaemia which can then be treated, improving the woman’s health and well-being during pregnancy.

From January women can also be scanned earlier, at 11 weeks, for spina bifida. Midwives can offer referrals for extra help during pregnancy including smoking cessation, advice on financial support during maternity leave, benefits, exercise and nutrition.
Tina Webb, 41, contacted the community midwifery service via her local GP practice. She has a 19–year-old daughter, Danielle, and gave birth to Mason on 30 November this year. Her elder son, Ryan, died of cancer the day before his ninth birthday in 2007. Because of this, and because of her age, she knew it would be best to get in touch with a midwife sooner rather than later.

The New Parks mum said: “I was able to talk with Lesley about my pregnancy, about how I felt about it. Of course she did all the things I expected, like checking my dates, estimating the due date, blood tests and dietary advice.

“But what was brilliant – and what I didn’t expect – was that she was so supportive of me, it was like having another friend to talk to. I could tell her all my fears about having Mason and she listened and was able to reassure me.”

“I’m so happy that I was able to give birth to Mason at home. Thanks to Lesley’s ante-natal support, I could have the birth I wanted and I think this was much better for the whole family.”

Tina’s community midwife Lesley Gilmour said: “The earlier a woman sees a midwife the more information she will have and the better choices she will be able to make for her baby.

“It’s better to get on well with your community midwife and so seeing one early on means you can establish that relationship with them.

“Women who start to see a midwife later on in their pregnancy tend to have more problems. Late appointments can be for many reasons, some women don’t know they’re pregnant, or perhaps they think because it’s a second pregnancy they know what to do, but all pregnancies are different and it’s essential to get advice as soon as possible.”

Midwives will advise women on diet too - soft cheeses, liver, uncooked eggs, peanuts are some of the foods which can harm the foetus as too much
vitamin A can cause development problems. Pregnant women are advised to only eat tuna once or twice a week and they need to have fresh green vegetables for iron and orange juice to absorb iron. Pregnancy creates changes in metabolism and circulation, which can increase the risk of bacterial food poisoning. And reactions may be more severe than normally. It’s rare, but not unknown, that the unborn baby can get sick too.

Women who are either pregnant or hoping to become pregnant also need to be taking folic acid regularly, ideally as soon as they start planning to have a baby. They should also give up alcohol and cigarettes to protect the health of their unborn baby from day one.

Pregnant women who have existing medical conditions should continue taking any medication unless they are advised to do otherwise by their midwife or GP. Midwives can also refer pregnant women to specialist consultant care for certain conditions. And, if a woman is unsure whether she is able to continue with a pregnancy, midwives are there to support and give advice on the options available.

For more information, photography or interviews with either community midwife Lesley Gilmour or new mum Tina Webb please contact Joanna Petersen on 0116 295 4123 or joanna.petersen@leicestercity.nhs.uk

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