Lifestyle factors associated with preterm births

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Smoking and pregnancy

- Smoking during pregnancy increases the risk of premature birth up to two fold and is associated with intrauterine growth restriction and premature rupture of membranes which increases the risk of preterm labour. The more cigarettes a mother smokes, the higher the risk.

> Smoking during pregnancy will:

- Lower the amount of O2 available to the mother and growing baby.
- Increase the risk of the baby being born prematurely.
- Increase the risk of LBW
- Increase the risk of miscarriage / having a stillbirth
- Passive smoking – is also hazardous- Regular exposure to passive smoking increases the chances of preterm birth, still birth and miscarriage.

Key to this is:

- Raising awareness about the risks associated with smoking and passive smoking is paramount.
- Identifying women at risk during the antenatal period
- Counselling and involving husbands or partners
- Provide smoking cessation programmes
Drinking alcohol/taking recreational drugs during pregnancy

Drinking alcohol during pregnancy can lead to:

- Brain disorder in damage, problems with growth and development
- Birth defects e.g. heart defects, hearing problems.
- Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD)
- Low birth weight
- Stillbirth
- Preterm birth
Nutrition and pregnancy

• The nutritional status of women when becoming pregnant and during pregnancy, can have significant influence on both the mother, fetus and infant health outcomes.

• Nutrition during pregnancy is probably the single most important environmental factor affecting pregnancy outcome.

• A healthy diet during pregnancy > healthy pregnancy > healthy baby.

• Poor nutrition in the mother, restricts growth and increases the risk of preterm births.

• Malnutrition increases vulnerability to infections predisposing pregnant women to preterm delivery.

• Therefore, education on healthy diet before and during pregnancy is important if we are to reduce poor outcomes.

• Educating women on which foods and quantities they need is key.

• Poor diet > anaemia
Weight

- BMI of less than 18 significantly increases the risk of having pre term delivery. Therefore increasing food security is paramount if we are to reduce adverse outcomes.

- BMI of 30 put a woman a greater risk of developing gest DM leading prematurity.

- Obesity is a problem of increasing magnitude, high BMI during pregnancy increases the risk of developing Gest DM. GDM is associated with preterm birth.

- Gest DM is more common among people of
  - Hispanic
  - African
  - South East origin.

What we need is
- Identify women at risk booking – BMI assessment
- Encourage regular antenatal care to help address diet issues
- Encourage women to include moderate physical activity in their daily routine to improve weight and cardiovascular status before during pregnancy and postnatally.
- More importantly encourage healthy eating
Maternal stressors

Such as:

- Depression
- Isolation
- Socio-economic hardship
Domestic Violence and Pregnancy

- Globally 40-70% of all female murder victims are killed by an intimate partner - (WHO 2011)

- 1:4 women experience domestic violence at some point in their lives

Prevalence in Africa (WHO 2011)
- 23%-40% prevalence rate for physical abuse
- 3-27% for sexual abuse
- 25%-49% for emotional abuse
- Abuse more likely to start in pregnancy and existing abuse may get worse during pregnancy
Intimate Partner Violence

Effects of intimate partner violence

**Behavioural**
- Alcohol/drug abuse
- Smoking
- Delayed access to care

**Reproductive**
- Low Birth Weight
- Preterm Labour
- STIs
- Miscarriage
- Unsafe abortions
Working and Pregnancy

Work place policies can promote healthy pregnancy and protect pregnant women and reduce the risk of preterm birth.

- Long working hours
- Long periods of standing
- Nights shifts
- Lack of time off for antenatal care
- Maternity leave
Exposure to pollutants

- Living in polluted environment
- Industry
- Air pollution
Prevention of preterm births: Raise awareness

- Pre-conception care
- Early access to healthcare
- Antenatal education / Health promotion
- Postnatal care / Family planning
Age

- Women younger than age 18 are more likely to have preterm delivery.

- Approximately 16 million adolescent girls between the age of 15 – 19 years give birth each year.

- Girls not physically prepared for pregnancy and childbirth.

- Despite increased risks for adolescent mothers, the social and cultural norms in developing countries perpetuate early marriage.

- Women older than age 35, are at risk of having preterm
References

• Lifestyle and premature birth: www.tommys.org

• Intimate Partner Violence during pregnancy: World health Organisation (2011) WHO Information sheet