

## PRECONCEPTIONAL COUNSELLING



In the changing scenario of delivery of health care system with particular reference to antenatal care there has been a subtle change where in young couples are approaching obstetricians prior to planning family. They are eager to know what is the ideal age, weight to start the pregnancy, whether they are physically fit to attempt pregnancy. All these questions can be answered in preconceptional counselling sessions.

Ideally a significant number of medical or obstetrical complications can be identified before pregnancy occurs. So when this happens the women will benefit considerably from a meeting with an obstetrician prior to conception to analyse her high risk factors and life style modification that she may adopt to maximize the outcome of pregnancy.

The ideal medical condition benefitting from preconceptional counselling is maternal diabetes. The prenatal education series discusses about the effects of diabetes on pregnancy and effect of pregnancy on diabetes, advantage of good metabolic control and importance of maintaining low preconceptional level of glycosylated haemoglobin to decrease the incidence of an abnormal baby.

The other conditions that will greatly benefit from preconceptional counselling are:

- Rh negative mothers
- H/O recurrent still births
- H/O having previous abnormal babies
- H/O Rubella infection in previous 3 months
- H/O thyroid abnormality detected recently

Routinely we do basic haemoglobin, random blood sugar, screening test for thyroid abnormalities, screening test for rubella. Routine testing for rubella IgG antibody prior to planning pregnancies is recommended. All susceptible patients should be immunized with rubella vaccination and once they take vaccination they are advised against attempting pregnancy for 3 months. Hepatitis in non immunized women is advised.

Because of high prevalence of thyroid disease, the use of iodized salt and practice of screening all patients for thyroid disorders are recommended because thyroid insufficiency is an important cause of mental retardation in offspring.

Women with previous history of baby with neural tube defect should be prescribed folic acid supplements, 4 mg/day for 3 months prior to attempting subsequent pregnancies.

Regarding maternal health problems of overweight, underweight, anaemia, abnormal pap smears are evaluated and treated appropriately. Drugs used before pregnancy are verified and changed if required so as to avoid any adverse affect on fetus during period of development. Women should be urged to stop smoking, taking alcohol and abusing drugs.

Inheritable genetic diseases like sickle cell disease, cystic fibrosis are screened before conception and the risk of passing on the condition to offspring is discussed. Importance of prenatal diagnosis for chromosomal of genetic diseases are discussed.

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