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To: WIC Coordinators

From: Penny Roth, M.S., R.D., LDN
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Subject: Preconception Health Lesson Plan & Self-Study Module

Date: September 14, 2010

In recognition of September as “National Infant Mortality Awareness Month” by the National Healthy Start Association, the Nutrition Education Advisory Group is pleased to provide a new “Illinois WIC Talks” lesson plan regarding preconception health. The health of a mother prior to conception has been identified as one of the key factors in improving a woman’s health during and after pregnancy which in turn increases her chances of having a healthy, full term baby.

The lesson plan and “Tips for Good Health” have been adapted from the Public Health Foundation Enterprises WIC program (PHFE-WIC), the largest WIC program in the nation. The following materials are attached:

- Illinois WIC Talk- Preconception Health Lesson Plan
- Self –Study Module
- “Tips for Good Health”
- “Tips for Good Health”- background for staff
- “Healthy Living- Make it a way of Life!”- handout

If you have any questions regarding this information, please contact your Regional Nutritionist Consultant.

CC: Carla McGill-Yearby, USDA
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“Illinois WIC Talk” Topic Guide

Topic

- Preconception Health.

Target Audience

- Postpartum Moms

Key Messages

- Get Fit: Eat healthy (including 400 mg of folic acid every day) and be active every day.
- Quit: Smoking, drugs, and drinking alcohol.
- Plan: Safe sex, and visit your doctor at least every year.

Handouts

- “Healthy Living: Make it a way of Life!” goal setting form

References

- Public Health Foundation Enterprises WIC Program (PHFE)
- March of Dimes: www.marchofdimes.com

Presenter Resources

- “Tips for Good Health”, Background for Staff
- Organization of teratology information specialists (www.otispregnancy.org)
- Georgia dept of human resources, family health branch (<http://health.state.ga.us/programs/family>)

“Illinois WIC Talk” Topic Guide

Group Education

Lesson Plan

Materials

- “Healthy Living: Make it a way of Life!” goal setting form
- List of 9 “Tips for Good Health” to write on flip chart, board, etc.

Lesson Plan Overview

1. Introduction/Icebreaker
2. **Why is it important to take care of yourself?**
3. **What do you do to keep your body healthy? Or What advice would you give to a woman to keep herself healthy, in case she has a surprise pregnancy?**
4. Write 9 “*Tips for Good Health*” on a flip chart or a board. Review each tip with the group. (Review “*Tips for Good Health*”, *Background for Staff* for more details)

Use open questions to discuss each point (example):

- **Why is that important to you?**

5. **What can you do today to take care of yourself?**

Offer handout, “*Healthy Living: Make it a way of Life!*”, and use back to help participants set goals.

Evaluation

- Measure knowledge by asking open-ended questions based on key messages.

“What is one new thing you learned today about staying healthy before having a baby?”

- Measure behavior change by asking open-ended questions to assess willingness to make changes.

“What is one thing you will change for yourself and your family?”

“What steps will you take to do this?”

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Methods

OPEN: Emotion-based counseling starts with provocative questions, activities or stories that lead to emotion-based conversations, not to an immediate transfer of knowledge.

Tips: Use Icebreakers or abstract concepts to draw out conversation and make the group comfortable with each other.

- **Introduces self (if you have children share their name and ages), topic, lesson overview and length of session.**
- **Have participants introduce themselves and their children.**

If you have fathers, grandparents and other family members in the session, be sure to include them. Remind them that most of these recommendations are important for everyone’s good health, including men, and they can support a woman before she becomes pregnant.

- **Much of your time is spent making sure your children and families stay healthy and grow well. Today we are going to focus on YOU and YOUR HEALTH.**

DIG: During the "dig" step, the facilitator asks questions to get the learners to open up and share their memories and experiences and get closer to the topic.

Tips: Use your personality and/or experiences to draw people out; silence is good (it means the learner is thinking!); correct misinformation with sensitivity, asking other participants for their thoughts (corrections are often taken better by peers).

- **Why is it important to take care of yourself?**

Sample Responses:

- *So you can take care of your family*
- *To stay healthy*

If you are planning to have another baby, your health between pregnancies is very important to the health of that baby. A mother’s health, even before she is pregnant, affects the baby for the rest of his life. More than half of mothers say that their last pregnancy was a surprise.

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- **What do you do to keep your body healthy?**
Or
- **What advice would you give to a woman to keep herself healthy, in case she has a surprise pregnancy?**

Sample Responses:

- *Eat healthy*
- *Be active*
- *Take vitamins*
- *Stop smoking, drinking alcohol and doing drugs*

CONNECT: During the "connect" step, parents connect the conversation topic with their values, attitudes, beliefs and feelings. The facilitator helps parents reflect on their personal needs and wants and connects them to the health-related behaviors being suggested.

Tips: Reflect on stories, examples and ideas shared by parents emphasizing the importance of all comments. Be sure to summarize the most important points.

Write 9 “*Tips For Good Health*” on a flip chart or board. (Review “*Tips for Good Health*”, “*Background for Staff*” for more details).

- **Let’s look at 9 things for mothers to do before getting pregnant. Most of these are important for everyone, even if you don’t plan to get pregnant.**

Use open questions to discuss each point (example):

- **Why is that important to you?**

TIP: When the group discusses - Folic Acid – be sure to include:

Folic Acid is a B-vitamin found in food and is very important in preventing birth defects. It also helps prevent strokes, heart disease and cancer. Foods high in folic acid include WIC cereals, beans, orange juice, dark green leafy vegetables, citrus fruits, whole grains and peanuts. Health experts recommend that every woman of child bearing age take a folic acid supplement every day, even when not pregnant.

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ACT: During this “step” the facilitator helps the participants identify specific action steps and build confidence to help them be the parent they want to be.

Tips: Let the parents choose what steps to take; wrap up by thanking clients for sharing their stories, examples and ideas; ask permission to share with others.

- **What are your questions?**
- **What can you do today to take care of yourself?**

Offer handout “Healthy Living: Make it a way of Life!”. Use back of handout to help participants set goals. Encourage them to share with the group.

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2) Individual Education

Procedures

- Not intended for high risk clients. May be best used for low risk clients who have missed group education or for agencies that do not offer group education sessions.
- Topic may be chosen based on client’s nutritional risk and/or interests.
- Remember to review identified risks and client agreement from the most recent certification.
- Offer handouts listed on cover page to reinforce the Key Messages.

Key Messages

- Get Fit: Eat healthy (including 400 mg of folic acid every day) and be active every day.
- Quit: Smoking, drugs, and drinking alcohol.
- Plan: Safe sex, and visit your doctor at least every year.

Methods

Ask the following (examples) of open-ended questions for the Key Messages to stimulate discussion and learn what they already know or heard about the topic.

- **Why is it important to take care of yourself?**
- **What do you do to keep your body healthy?**
- **Or**
- **What advice would you give to a woman to keep herself healthy, in case she has a surprise pregnancy?**

Offer handout “Healthy Living: Make it a way of Life!”. (Review “Tips For Good Health”, “Background for Staff” for more details).

- **These are things mothers should do before getting pregnant. Most of these are important for everyone, even if you don’t plan to get pregnant.**
- **Which on of these tips are most important to you?**
- **What questions do you have?**
- **What can you do today to take care of yourself?**

Use back of the handout to help client set a goal for change.

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2) Self-Study Module (SSM) *(start on a separate page)*

Procedures

Agencies must have a procedure for using SSM, PPM NE 5.2

Methods *(instructions do not need to be included)*

- Have client read handout *“Healthy Living: Make it a way of Life!”* and then complete the SSM worksheet.
- Be sure CHP is available to answer any questions client may have on the topic.

Healthy Living: Make it a way of Life!



Get Fit

- Be active
- Eat healthy
-

Quit

- Smoking
- Drinking
- Using drugs
-

Plan It

- Pregnancy
- Safe sex
- Doctor/Dental visits
- Time for yourself
-

Change for Yourself...Change for your Family

*See back for ideas or ask how I can help!

What steps can you take to live a healthy life?

Be Active-

- Regular exercise will help you feel better. Unless your doctor tells you not to be physically active, include at least 30 minutes of physical activity into your day.

Eat healthy-

- Eat of variety of fruits and vegetables every day! Include more dark-green and orange vegetables and cooked dry beans.
- Make half your grains whole- choose more whole grain foods such as brown rice, whole wheat breads and pastas.
- Go lean with protein- choose low-fat or lean meats and poultry. Lean meats include products that have “round” or “loin” in the name such as: ground round, pork loin, etc.
- Get your calcium-rich foods- go low-fat or fat-free when you choose milk, yogurt and cheese.
- Did you know birth defects may happen before you even know you are pregnant? One way to decrease these risks is by taking a vitamin supplement that contains at least 400 micrograms of folic acid every day.

For more information on healthy eating visit: <http://mypyramid.gov>

Smoking-

- Smoking or being around others' smoke can cause your baby to be born too small or too soon to be healthy.

Drinking-

- Drinking alcohol (beer, wine, wine coolers, hard liquor and even cough and cold medicines) can cause birth defects and other problems for your baby.

Drugs-

- Using illegal drugs or even some medicines (prescribed or bought over-the-counter) can cause miscarriage, brain damage, addiction, and/or death to your baby. Talk to your doctor about any drugs or medicines you use.

Pregnancy-

- Planning your future is important. Family Planning lets you decide if and when you want a child, and help you have a healthy baby. If you are having sex, it's important to use a method of birth control until you are ready to have a baby.

Safe Sex-

- Practice safe sex, use a condom every time.

Doctor/Dental Visits-

- Schedule a doctor/dental visit every year; a well woman visit. Your doctor will assess your health and help guide you in making any necessary lifestyle changes before pregnancy.
- Know your family history. If you have had problem pregnancies or birth defects in your family, you should talk about it with your doctor.
- Make sure your immunizations are up to date. Some illnesses can cause birth defects if a woman gets them while she is pregnant.

Time for Yourself-

- Take time each day to slow down, relax and laugh! High levels of stress can affect your health.

“Healthy Living: Make it a way of Life!” – Take the Test!

KEY

6. Be physically active for at least _____ minutes most days of the week.
- a. 30
 - b. 40
 - c. 50
 - d. 60
7. What is part of a “healthy diet”?
- a. Eating a variety of fruits and vegetables
 - b. Eating more whole grain foods
 - c. Choosing lean protein
 - d. Eating low fat calcium rich foods (milk, yogurt, cheese)
 - e. All of the above
8. You can decrease your risk for birth defects by taking a vitamin supplement that contains at least 400 micrograms of _____ every day.
- a. Calcium
 - b. Folic Acid
 - c. Vitamin C
 - d. Iron
9. The following can be harmful to you and an unborn baby:
- a. Smoking
 - b. Drinking
 - c. Drugs
 - d. All of the above
10. What steps can you take to plan a healthy pregnancy? _____
- Your next pregnancy
 - Safe sex
 - Doctor visits
 - Dental visits
 - Time for yourself

Background for Staff

Tips For Good Health

- 1. Eat a healthy diet and get to a healthy weight:**

60% of Americans are overweight. Women have a greater challenge with losing the excess weight they may have gained during their pregnancy. (Breastfeeding can help with losing some of this weight.)

With each pregnancy this pattern could continue, leading to obesity over time. Research has shown that obese and overweight women are at greater risk for gestational diabetes, PIH or pregnancy induced hypertension (high BP, toxemia), pre-term labor, and maternal mortality. After delivery, overweight and obese women have more difficulty initiating and maintaining breastfeeding than do women of normal weight.
- 2. Be physically active every day:** Being physically active for at least 30 minutes every day is important for good health and can help with weight maintenance. Sitting or being sedentary for long periods of time is not healthy. A woman who is physically active before and during her pregnancy will have a greater chance of having an easier delivery and a healthy baby.
- 3. Get a medical and dental checkup every year:** An annual physical and dental check up is recommended for everyone. Research indicates that poor oral health in pregnant women is linked to pre term labor. Before getting pregnant, women should be current with their immunizations, and should be tested for diabetes, high blood pressure, infections and other health problems.
- 4. Take a multivitamin with folic acid daily:** Most Americans do not get all their nutritional needs met through food. To ensure that you meet all your nutrient needs, it is suggested to take a multivitamin supplement everyday. It is recommended that all women of child bearing age take a multivitamin supplement with **400 micrograms of folic acid to prevent neural tube birth defects.**
- 5. Plan when you want to have a baby:** More than 50% of pregnancies are unplanned. Family planning counseling from your doctor can help prevent an unplanned pregnancy. A woman's health, from the moment she gets pregnant, has major influence on the development of the fetus. A woman who plans her pregnancy has the opportunity to help her body be ready for a baby from the moment of conception. When a woman has a "surprise" pregnancy, she may have health problems (such as being overweight, diabetes, etc.) which were not taken care of or resolved. These may affect her unborn baby for the rest of his life. Each time a woman gets pregnant, her growing baby uses her body for all the nutrition it needs. This depletes the woman's nutritional stores, so she has to ensure that her body is back to good health before she gets pregnant again. Doctors recommend at least 2 years between pregnancies to allow a woman's body to recover from the previous pregnancy.
- 6. Stop smoking, drinking alcohol and taking illegal drugs:** When a woman stops these behaviors before she gets pregnant, she can make sure that the fetus is not exposed to these chemicals from the moment she gets pregnant.
In men, alcohol may decrease sperm production, and smoking is linked to some heart defects.
- 7. Identify and learn to manage your stress:** Very high levels of stress may contribute to preterm birth or low birth weight in full-term babies. Stress is also known to contribute to

weight gain. Stress management strategies may include: exercise, relaxation techniques, fostering healthy friendships, getting plenty of sleep, professional counseling or psychotherapy. The payoff of managing stress is peace of mind and perhaps — a longer, healthier life.

8. **Get adequate sleep:** Insufficient sleep is associated with a number of chronic diseases and conditions. Chronic sleep loss and sleep disorders are also associated with health problems. Research, for example, has found that insufficient sleep is linked to an increased risk for the development of type 2 diabetes. Chronic sleep loss and sleeping disorders themselves are associated with any number of physical and mental health problems, including obesity, hypertension, diabetes, depression, anxiety, and high cholesterol and mortality. If you are one of the many people who are short on sleep, here are CDC's tips: *Stick to a regular sleep schedule. Sleep in a dark, well-ventilated space at a comfortable temperature. Avoid stimulating activities within two hours of bedtime. Avoid caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol in the evening. Avoid going to bed on a full or empty stomach. See a doctor if you are concerned about chronic sleep problems.*
9. **Find people who can support you to be healthy:** It is important for a woman to have emotional and physical support from her family (partner/husband/other members) so that she can be in good health before she plans her pregnancy. A woman should ask for help from friends and family when she feels she needs it. It is easier to change behavior and stay with a healthy plan if there are people around you supporting you in your decision and helping make your life more manageable.

What can men do to support the preconception health of their female partners and their future babies?

Men can make a big difference in promoting good preconception health. As boyfriends, husbands, fathers-to-be, partners, and family members, they can learn how their loved ones can achieve optimal preconception health. They can encourage and support women in every aspect of preparing for pregnancy.

There are other ways men can help. Men who work with chemicals or other toxins need to be careful that they don't expose women to them. For example, men who use fertilizers or pesticides in agricultural jobs should change out of dirty work clothes before coming near their female partners. They should handle and wash soiled clothes separately. The family health histories of men are also important when planning a pregnancy.

Good preconception health care is about managing current health conditions. By taking action on health issues BEFORE pregnancy, future problems for the mother and baby can be prevented.

Resources:

March of Dimes www.marchofdimes.com

Organization of Teratology Information Specialists www.otispregnancy.org

Georgia Department of Human resources, Family health branch. <http://health.state.ga.us/programs/family>

Tips For Good Health

1. *Eat a balanced diet and maintain a healthy weight.*
2. *Be physically active every day.*
3. *Get medical and dental checkups every year.*
4. *Take a multivitamin with folic acid every day.*
5. *Plan when you want to have a baby.*
6. *Stop smoking, drinking alcohol and taking illegal drugs.*
7. *Learn to lower your stress.*
8. *Get adequate sleep.*
9. *Find people who can support you to be healthy, both physically and mentally.*