

# Your Guide to an Empowered Pregnancy

First Choice<sup>SM</sup> by Select Health of South Carolina works toward the best health for our members and their communities. We know that, unfortunately, national and state studies have found that Black women may experience higher-risk pregnancies.<sup>1</sup> We have made it our mission to end this disparity and help all receive the quality care they deserve.

Currently, the evidence shows:<sup>1</sup>

- Women of color, including Black women, are as much as 50% more likely to give birth too early.
- Black women have three times more risk of death from problems related to pregnancy and childbirth.
- Black infants are more than twice as likely as white infants to die within their first year of life.

We're here to support you. Many of these pregnancy-related problems can be prevented. Having a strong relationship and being comfortable discussing information with your provider is important for your health care and that of your baby.<sup>1</sup>



Many women bring a support person with them to provider visits during pregnancy. This person can be a partner, friend, or family member. We encourage you to bring someone who adds to your comfort. It may help to talk with them afterward about the experience.

## Making the most of health care: Talk with your provider

We want you to feel comfortable voicing your needs with your provider:

- Openly share your questions and concerns.
- Include any concerns you have about how racism may affect health care.

Research suggests that experiencing discrimination or racism may help cause a rise in stress levels. Long-term stress may lead to high blood pressure (hypertension). It may also bring a higher risk of heart disease and other pregnancy-related conditions.<sup>2</sup>

Hypertension and heart disease contribute to more pregnancy-related deaths among Black women than white women.<sup>3</sup> Hypertension may also lead to another pregnancy-related condition, called pre-eclampsia. If it is not found and treated, pre-eclampsia can lead to:<sup>4</sup>

- Organ damage for the mother.
- Low birth weight, early birth, or death for the baby.

We want you to feel sure that your health care needs are being met. If you have questions or concerns, or if you do not feel you are being listened to by your provider, please contact us. If you feel you are not getting the care you need for you and your baby, call us at **1-888-276-2020**. We will listen to your concern and help you to find a solution.



## Talk with your provider

At your first or next prenatal checkup, talk to your provider about:



### Any concerns you have about your health care.

You can mention that you have read that Black women have a higher chance of problems during pregnancy and childbirth.<sup>1</sup> Ask your provider how you can work together to prevent these problems.

At each prenatal checkup, talk to your provider about:



**Blood pressure.** Talk to your provider about ways to keep or reach a healthy blood pressure. A high blood pressure is greater than 140/90. Take note of your blood pressure at each appointment. If you see any changes that concern you, discuss your concerns with your provider. Black women have a higher risk of problems related to blood pressure in pregnancy.<sup>2</sup>

During at least one prenatal checkup, talk to your provider about:



**Pain.** Talk through options for managing pain during and after labor. Studies have shown that Black patients tend to be treated for pain less often and less effectively than white patients.<sup>5</sup> Ask your provider how they will help you get the right treatment to manage pain.



**Cesarean deliveries.** Cesarean deliveries, or C-sections, have been more common for Black women than for women of other races.<sup>6</sup> Talk to your provider about when and why they might advise a cesarean delivery and how it relates to your birth plan.

## Watch for signs of a problem in pregnancy

Call your provider or go to the ER right away if you have:<sup>7</sup>

- Bad headache that lasts even after taking medicine and drinking lots of water.
- Blurry or spotty vision.
- Dizziness.
- Trouble breathing, painful or tight chest, or a fast heartbeat.
- Fever of at least 100.4°F.
- Major swelling or loss of feeling in your hands or face.
- Severe stomachache.
- Severe nausea and vomiting.
- Blood or other fluid leaking from your vagina.
- Much less movement from your baby than before.
- Extreme tiredness or sadness.
- Seizures.

## Plan your pregnancy care

**Schedule your prenatal checkups** as soon as you find out you're pregnant. These checkups usually occur:<sup>8</sup>

- Once a month during weeks 4 through 28.
- Twice a month during weeks 28 through 36.
- Each week during weeks 36 until the birth.

If your pregnancy has a higher risk of complications, you may need to see your provider more often.<sup>8</sup> Ask your provider how to prepare for office visits during the COVID-19 pandemic.



**Track your blood pressure.** Blood pressure problems can put you and your baby at risk. Know your numbers: A high blood pressure is greater than 140/90. Take note of your blood pressure at each appointment. If you see any changes that concern you, discuss your concerns with your provider.



**Get your recommended shots (vaccines).** Talk with your provider about getting a flu vaccine. Ask your provider whether they suggest you get a COVID-19 vaccine or any other vaccines.



**If you smoke, pick up the phone.** A quitline can offer key support to help you stop smoking, at no cost to you. Call the South Carolina Tobacco Quitline at **1-800-QUIT-NOW (784-8669)**.



### Notice how you feel every day.

Know how your body feels normally, and notice any changes from that. Also notice changes in your emotions. It's normal to feel some fatigue or worry during pregnancy. But if you feel extreme sadness, anxiety, or tiredness, you might have prenatal depression.<sup>9</sup> Call your provider or our 24/7 Nurse Call Line at **1-800-304-5436**.



**Plan for your delivery.** Ask your provider how to prepare for your baby's birth. We're also here for you. If you have questions or need help, call us at **1-888-276-2020**.

The information in this document is to help you learn more about this topic. It is not to take the place of your health care provider. If you have questions, talk with your health care provider. If you think you need to see your health care provider because of something you have read in this information, please contact your health care provider. Never stop or wait to get medical attention because of something you have read in this material.

Sources:

1. "A Health Crisis Impacting Women and Babies of Color," March of Dimes, <https://www.marchofdimes.org/mission/health-disparities.aspx>.
2. "Race, Discrimination, and Cardiovascular Disease," *American Medical Association Journal of Ethics*, <https://journalofethics.ama-assn.org/article/race-discrimination-and-cardiovascular-disease/2014-06>.
3. "Racial and Ethnic Disparities Continue in Pregnancy-Related Deaths," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2019/p0905-racial-ethnic-disparities-pregnancy-deaths.html>.
4. "High Blood Pressure and Women," American Heart Association, <https://www.heart.org/en/health-topics/high-blood-pressure/why-high-blood-pressure-is-a-silent-killer/high-blood-pressure-and-women>.
5. "Racial Bias in Pain Assessment and Treatment Recommendations, and False Beliefs About Biological Differences Between Blacks and Whites," U.S. National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4843483>.
6. "Total Cesarean Deliveries by Race/Ethnicity: United States, 2016 – 2018 Average," March of Dimes, <https://www.marchofdimes.org/Peristats/ViewSubtopic.aspx?reg=99&top=8&stop=356&lev=1&slev=1&obj=1>.
7. "Urgent Maternal Warning Signs," CDC, <https://www.cdc.gov/hearher/maternal-warning-signs/index.html>.
8. "Prenatal Care and Tests," Office on Women's Health, <https://www.womenshealth.gov/pregnancy/youre-pregnant-now-what/prenatal-care-and-tests>.
9. "Perinatal Depression," National Institute of Mental Health, <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/perinatal-depression>.

If your primary language is not English, language services are available to you free of charge.

Call **1-888-276-2020**  
(TTY **1-888-765-9586**).

Si habla español, tiene a su disposición servicios gratuitos de asistencia lingüística. Llame al **1-888-276-2020** (TTY **1-888-765-9586**).

**FirstChoice**<sup>SM</sup>  
by Select Health of South Carolina  
**Your Hometown Health Plan**

Healthy Connections 

[www.selecthealthofsc.com](http://www.selecthealthofsc.com)

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## First Choice is here to support you and your baby

You needn't walk the road to motherhood alone. We are here for you. Many resources are just a phone call away.

### Member Services

If you need help making an appointment or scheduling a ride, call us at **1-888-276-2020** (TTY **1-888-765-9586**).

### 24/7 Nurse Call Line

We are also available 24/7 through our Nurse Call Line at **1-800-304-5436**.

### Bright Start maternity care program

We help pregnant members make healthy choices for themselves and their unborn baby! Call Bright Start at **1-888-276-2020**, Monday – Friday, 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. Or log in to the member portal and go to **Enroll in a Special Program** to get started.

### Keys to Your Care<sup>®</sup> program

You can receive text messages\* each week during your pregnancy. These messages include appointment reminders and educational information. Text **FCMOM** to **85886** or call us at **1-888-276-2020** to join the Keys to Your Care program.

Don't have access to texting? No problem! First Choice works with SafeLink Wireless<sup>®</sup> to provide a smartphone for member households in need. Smartphones include 4.5 GB of data, 350 monthly minutes, and unlimited text messages at no cost to you. Visit [www.selecthealthofsc.com/member/english/info-for-you/first-choice-safelink.aspx](http://www.selecthealthofsc.com/member/english/info-for-you/first-choice-safelink.aspx) for details. Visit [www.safelink.com](http://www.safelink.com) or call SafeLink at **1-877-631-2550** to apply. Use promo code "AmeriHealth."

### Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)

WIC provides healthy foods, health and nutrition education, breastfeeding support, and other services at no charge to families who qualify. Visit <https://scdhec.gov/health/wic-nutrition-program> to learn more and apply.

\* Standard messaging and data fees may apply.

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