

# HEALTH FOCUS DRUG ABUSE AND PREGNANCY: A VERY TRAGIC COMBINATION

By Donald Wesson, M.D.

Many expectant mothers affectionately use the old expression, "Now I am eating for two." It is true that everything a mother consumes enters the body of her unborn child—including drugs.

Infant mortality in the United States is among the highest of industrialized nations. According to the National Center for Health Statistics, more than 38,000 infants died before their first birthday last year. In many cases, drug abuse during pregnancy was a contributing factor.

Studies have shown that a baby's growth and development are adversely affected when pregnant women use some

drugs. Drug abuse can lead to debilitating birth defects, such as low birth weight, physical deformities and developmental problems.

The mother-child bond literally begins during pregnancy. Food nutrients and other substances move freely across the placenta, which is attached to the uterus and provides nourishment to the unborn child. Because of the link of the mother's and the developing child's tissues, it is important for the expectant mother to think seriously before she eats, drinks or takes any drug.

The first step toward making sure both mother and baby are

healthy at delivery is to seek proper prenatal care. A physician (preferably an obstetrician/gynecologist) can tell you which drugs to avoid and also provide information on diet, rest and exercise.

Certain drugs should be used only when necessary during pregnancy. With the exception of drugs approved by your doctor such as acetaminophen, all drugs are forbidden during pregnancy. This is especially true during the first three months when the baby's vital organs are being developed. It is important during this critical time that mothers-to-be adopt a healthy, drug-free lifestyle.

Some prescription drugs taken by a pregnant mother can also do harm to her unborn child. Tell your doctor which drugs you are taking (including those purchased over-the-counter) to be sure they are safe for you and your baby.

Drugs such as cocaine and heroin can have more immediate and devastating consequences to the developing baby. Cocaine, whether inhaled as crack, sniffed in powdered form, or injected into the veins, can also cause abnormalities in the child's nervous system.

With "crack babies," restlessness, irritability and poor responsiveness are evident at birth. Such drugs are addictive to the mother and the child.

Many people do not consider the consequences of two commonly used drugs — alcoholic

## URBAN LEAGUE TEAMS UP WITH MARY KAY COSMETICS FOR A WORKSHOP FOR YOUNG MOTHERS



CHICAGO — The Urban League recently teamed up with Mary Kay Cosmetics to host a health and beauty workshop for young mothers. Pictured here is Tommi Pleasure, Executive Senior Sales Director with Mary Kay, sharing tips on proper skin care and beauty with one of the participants. The workshop was one of several coordinated by the Greater Washington Urban League to educate and prepare young mothers for the work force.

## VOLUNTEER MOTHERS NEEDED IN WLVA BABY FIND PROGRAM EXPANDS

A group of concerned mothers of West Las Vegas got together with the Clark County Health District to form the Baby Find Program eight months ago — Since that time the program has grown steadily and now needs additional volunteer resource mothers.

The Baby Find Program is dedicated to providing mother to mother support for at risk pregnant women and at the same time lower the low birth rate and infant mortality rate in the Afro-American community.

Baby Find operates by recruiting volunteer resource mothers or "big sisters", and pairing them with at risk pregnant women — "little sisters". Big sisters do whatever they can to ensure their little sister has a safe and successful pregnancy and then continues to support and guide her for up to one year after delivery. Volunteer resource mothers receive training and support from the program coordinator who is a registered nurse. Little sisters are from all age groups, but many teenage moms are in need of this kind of help.

Baby Find is all about moms helping moms and community helping community — to continue to make this program work and provide each little sister with a big sister we need more volunteers, so if you are a mother (or grandmother) living in West or North Las Vegas and feel you could help, please contact Ruth Kastel at 383-1411 or Treopia Anderson at 594-3174.

beverages and cigarettes. Both can enter the bloodstream and harm the unborn child. For example, alcohol can cause fetal alcohol syndrome, which permanently damages a child's

weighing significantly less than average at birth have a greater risk of dying before their first birthday.

The miracle of life is a wonderful experience. Parents,

families and a competent physician can all play a role. It is your first responsibility as a mother to follow a prevention strategy that includes avoiding the use of harmful drugs.

## FOR THE LADIES

### FOR MOTHER

By Bonita Armstrong

A friend of mine who is also a working mother shared something with me that I would like to share with you. I don't know who the author of this thought is, but it is very relevant to many of us who try to do it all. I am eternally thankful to my friend who shared this piece of inspiration with me. It really hit home. I hope you clip it out and keep it somewhere so you can reflect on it occasionally.

One of the greatest gifts my mother gave me was that she was a terrible housekeeper. She wasn't terrible at everything. She was a published poet, a great writer of short stories, a painter, a breaker and trainer of horses, an avid reader, a knowledgeable collector of antiques, a seeker into the mysteries of the world, a good mother, a true,



BONITA ARMSTRONG

loyal, and devoted friend, incurably curious, an authority on American Indian lore, an intuitive searcher for precious rocks, fossils, and gems, a defender of everyone's civil rights, and most of all a fascinating and entertaining woman, but she couldn't keep the kitchen clean and she felt bad about it.

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