



Five Key Things for a Healthy Pregnancy and Delivery

Every year in the United States, four million babies are born. Tragically, however, almost 26,000 babies are lost in-utero due to stillbirth. Stillbirth is the highest contributor to perinatal mortality, yet it's rarely discussed by OB/GYNs and because of this, women are not aware of steps they can take to reduce the risk of stillbirth.

Dr. Ruth C. Fretts, OB/GYN at Harvard Vanguard and Associates and world-renowned researcher on causes and cures for stillbirth, is a leading advocate for educating women and encouraging practitioners to have conversations about stillbirth.

"For too long, stillbirth has been the "elephant in the room" and practitioners have not discussed it with their patients. Consequently, when a tragedy occurs, they are not prepared to help parents cope with the grief. May 2015 marks the first time stillbirth has been included on the agenda at the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology. Stillbirth is still a significant issue in the United States, and we are now taking a more active role in identifying ways to increase the likelihood of positive birth outcomes as well as the importance of a woman's health during pregnancy."

[First Candle](#), the nation's leading non-profit organization committed to helping all babies reach their first birthday, in partnership with [The Boppy Company](#) and support from [Babies "R" Us](#), recently launched a new campaign, [Pregnant and Empowered](#), aimed at educating parents-to-be on prenatal health and wellness in order to minimize the risks associated with premature labor and stillbirth.

Here are five things a mom-to-be should know for a healthy pregnancy and safe birth:

Start your prenatal care as early as possible and keep all appointments

OB/GYN's front offices are incredibly busy and your appointment is not always top of mind for them! It's up to you to remember appointments and be sure they are scheduled in a timely manner. Prenatal vitamins and folic acid are important for you and your baby's health.

Maintain a healthy diet and healthy lifestyle

Talk with your doctor about the right nutrition program for you to maintain a healthy weight. Exercise is important and it's best if you start a program before you get pregnant and then continue through your pregnancy and delivery. Research indicates there is an increased risk of stillbirth with women who have a higher Body Mass Index (BMI).

Get plenty of rest

Studies show that women who get six hours of sleep or less are more likely to have prolonged labor. The position in which you sleep is also important. Sleeping on your left side as much as possible during the last trimester can also reduce the risk of stillbirth.

Practice counting your baby's kicks

Dr. Fretts notes that counting your baby's kicks is the easiest and most effective way to reduce the risk of stillbirth. Monitor your baby's activity EVERY DAY beginning in week 28. Use a Kicks Count! Chart to log the amount of time it takes to count 10 kicks. If you notice a change in your baby's normal pattern, call your doctor immediately. Download a free [First Candle Kicks Count! Chart](#).

Become your own advocate

Understand tests available to you if you are concerned about your baby's movements. Have the confidence to be persistent in requesting them:

- Non-Stress Test
- Biophysical Profile
- Ultrasound
- Contraction Stress Test

Also, know the warning signs of premature labor. Call your doctor **immediately** if you have one or more of the following symptoms:

- Contractions (abdomen tightening like a fist every 10 minutes or more often)
- Vaginal bleeding or leaking fluid
- Pelvic pressure (like your baby is pushing down)
- Low, dull backache
- Cramps that feel like your period
- Abdominal cramps (with or without diarrhea)

For more information on becoming Pregnant and Empowered, visit the [First Candle website](#).