

## Early prenatal care is critical says doctor

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Life Carstenhof Hospital specialist obstetrician and gynaecologist and subspecialist gynaecology oncologist Dr Maiden Mugwede believes early antenatal care is critical to pregnant women.

Antenatal care, also known as prenatal care, is the care provided by skilled healthcare professionals to women throughout their pregnancy.

This is as the world will be commemorating Pregnancy Awareness Week, set aside by the Department of Health, to strengthen pregnancy education, as well as stressing the important issues that promote healthy pregnancy and safe motherhood. The aim of awareness week, which runs from February 10 – 16, is to reduce the number of maternal deaths and complications from pregnancy.

Mugwede said pregnant women need to start attending antenatal care as soon as they suspect that they are pregnant, preferably within the first trimester. "Women with underlying medical conditions should ideally be seen by a clinician prior to conceiving. Early pregnancy care allows the screening and treatment of maternal medical conditions, foetal assessment including diagnosis of multiple pregnancies and congenital abnormalities," said Mugwede.

She said early antenatal care provides various benefits including the opportunity to exclude and manage existing medical conditions which can be aggravated by the pregnancy, such as hypertension, diabetes, infections and anaemia.

According to Mugwede medical attention also gives expecting moms free HIV testing and voluntary counselling (VCT), early recognition of danger signs in pregnancy and post-delivery, birth preparedness and complication readiness.



Specialist obstetrician and gynaecologist and subspecialist gynaecology oncologist Dr Maiden Mugwede from Life Carstenhof Hospital.

"[This also includes] self-care including nutrition and high standard of hygiene and information on the role of the father, the male partner and the family."

However, she said, unfortunately not enough information is being shared with women to promote a healthy pregnancy. Mugwede said this was because women were booking late for their first antenatal visits.

As a result, some women encounter undiagnosed and untreated medical conditions which classify their pregnancy as high risk, hence increasing maternal and foetal risks during the pregnancy.

"Most information is given when pregnant women access a health care facility through pamphlets or internet searches. It may be given by a health promotion counsellor or the attending clinician who may be a midwife, general practitioner or obstetrician."

Asked how often expectant moms have to undergo pregnancy care in their pregnancy duration, she said pregnancy care visits will depend on whether the pregnancy is low or high risk. Mugwede said visits are usually on a monthly basis during the early months.

"[And] towards late pregnancy, the foetal surveillance increases, as well as the need to rule out maternal late onset medical complications and the visits, increase to every one to two weeks," she concluded.

# PREGNANCY WEEK

## Sunninghill gynaecologist talks about non-surgical vaginal rejuvenation therapies gaining ground

"The physical changes brought on by ageing and childbirth are among the most common, yet least talked about experiences for many women."

This is according to Dr Taheera Hassim, an obstetrician and gynaecologist practicing at Netcare Sunninghill Hospital. She explained that the relaxation of vaginal tissue, incontinence, vaginal dryness, and a decrease in sexual pleasure can, in many cases, be improved without the need for surgery.

"The changes in the body can impact a woman's overall well-being and quality of life as well as her sexual health and confidence. It is important to discuss these everyday healthcare issues, as many women are not aware of the non-invasive solutions available," said Hassim.

She said non-surgical vaginal rejuvenation can boost the

production of collagen, which is important for providing strength and support to one's skin, muscles, connective tissue, and bones. "This increase in collagen production has the effect of tightening vaginal skin and tissue and can have tremendous benefits in addressing functional concerns such as incontinence and atrophic vaginitis, or dryness, as well as improving the feeling of pleasure during sexual intercourse."

**'It is important that you are in good health and not currently pregnant to undergo this treatment modality'**

She added energy-based forms of vaginal rejuvenation therapies, which make use of thermal or non-thermal energy, are increasingly gaining ground globally. "By using radiofrequency and ultrasound technology to gently heat up and shrink collagen fibres, natural collagen production in the vaginal tissue is stimulated."

"The treatments are administered by a doctor in their consulting rooms, offering an advanced, safe, and effective non-invasive alternative to surgical vaginal rejuvenation procedures such as labiaplasty and vaginoplasty."

Hassim explained that each treatment session is eight to 16 minutes long and involves the insertion of a vaginal probe into the vaginal canal, as well as passing the probe along the outer lips of the vagina.

The probe has different form-fitting applicator tips and is designed to account for women's different vaginal canal sizes and shapes. "This ensures that treatment is in no way painful, although the probe may feel

warm. The temperature used is adjusted to suit individual patients' heat tolerance and the heat is distributed evenly across the probe, minimising any discomfort."

"Treatments are carried out once a week for a recommended three sessions and normal daily activities can be resumed immediately after the procedure, as any redness or mild swelling will dissipate within a few hours. Patients can even resume sexual activity the same day."

The benefits of a non-invasive form of vaginal rejuvenation are many, with results including improved skin texture, tightness, and sensation.

Hassim said that such treatments are well worth considering for menopausal women and women who have given birth. "When women age, they also have to deal with the drop of oestrogen levels, which can also cause the thinning and dryness of vaginal walls and, ultimately, vaginal atrophy. As a consequence of vaginal atrophy, women can experience vaginal discomfort and infections, urinary incontinence, and pain during sexual intercourse among other issues."

She concluded, "It is important that you are in good health and not currently pregnant to undergo this treatment modality. An open and honest conversation with your doctor is essential to finding the best possible treatment option for your individual needs, and in order to rule out whether a surgical approach may not be a better solution."

### Pregnant women need to know their rights, including:

- The right of a woman to choose her companion who will provide her with support during pregnancy and childbirth, and who will accompany her to the antenatal care clinic, as well as when she goes into labour.
- The right of the woman to be treated with respect, dignity and confidentiality.
- The right of the woman to ask questions and also to get an explanation about her condition.

### Tips for first-time pregnant women:



- Book your first antenatal visit early.
- Attend all scheduled antenatal visits.



- Be aware of the pregnancy danger signs.



- Know when to call your doctor with concerns.



- Eat healthily.



- Exercise regularly but do not overdo it.



- Avoid self-medication and herbal remedies without medical consult.

