

## Pre-natal care / God as Father

**Rachel:** I've just heard that you're expecting a baby – that's wonderful news! I'm so excited for you.

**A:** I don't quite know what to expect. It's exciting- and a bit scary!

**Tammy:** Hey Carol, do you remember your first pregnancy? Were you excited but scared at the same time?

**Carol:** Oh Tammy, do I ever. I think all mothers remember every pregnancy – but that first one is kind of special isn't it?

**Tammy:** It is. It's new and exciting, and you can't wait to hold that new little life in your arms.

**Carol:** Today on Women of Hope our special friend is Rachel and she's here to help us understand what to expect when we're pregnant. Rachel works as a midwife in Zambia and she really cares about having healthy mothers and babies. Welcome, Rachel.

**Rachel:** Thank you Carol. Yes I do care, so I'd like to chat to *you* if you're pregnant- or if you're just interested.

**Tammy:** Well, Caro & I are not pregnant, but we are interested!

**Rachel:** Well, if you're pregnant your period will stop – that might be the first thing you notice. Now that your period has stopped, you should have *no* further bleeding until after the baby comes. If you have *any* amount of bleeding before then, you should go and see a midwife or a doctor as soon as possible. *Don't wait to see if the bleeding will stop by itself.* Any bleeding in pregnancy is *not normal* and the mother should be seen right away.

**Tammy:** I can see where a young mother might think: 'why not wait a while to see if the bleeding will stop by itself?'

**Rachel:** Well, the bleeding can get worse very quickly and soon the mother's life can be in danger. If you wait and it gets worse, it might be too late to get help.

**Tammy:** OK! So we won't ignore any bleeding!

**Rachel:** Do you feel tired? That's *very* normal! The baby's growing at such an amazingly fast rate that your body needs extra rest. This tired feeling is usually worse at the beginning and end of a pregnancy, but you might find that you just need extra rest right through your pregnancy. You also need to eat good food while you're pregnant so you can grow a healthy baby.

**Carol:** We often talk about healthy food on Women of Hope - and having a balanced diet of vegetables, fruit, grains and other starchy foods, and some protein foods like meats, eggs, nuts, beans, and cheese.

**Rachel:** That's *always* good advice. You don't need a lot *more* food when you're pregnant, but you might need more *protein*, especially meat for iron, and more milk and vegetables, if you can get them.

Are your breasts sore and tender to touch? Although it's uncomfortable, it's very normal – just about every pregnant woman experiences this when she is first pregnant. Some women also feel sick, others vomit and don't feel like eating anything at all. Even the smell of their favourite food makes them feel ill! Again, this is not unusual, or dangerous, even though you might *feel* terrible. But it's important to remember that if you *cannot keep any fluids down for 24 hours, or you have not passed urine for 24 hours*, you should go and see your midwife or doctor. You could get dehydrated, or dried out, and that's dangerous for you *and* your baby.

**Carol:** Rachel, tell us what care you think a woman needs while she's pregnant?

**Rachel:** Sure. You've probably seen your friends, sisters, or aunties go to the clinic or the hospital at regular times during their pregnancy, for a check-up.

**Carol:** I think we can all agree that this is *important*, isn't it!

**Rachel:** Yes, it's important so that the health worker can quickly find any problems that come up during the pregnancy. The problems could be with the mother – like high blood pressure or HIV/AIDS –or with the baby – like a baby that's not growing properly. Or maybe they'll find that you're having twins, and the health worker will want to see you more often.

**Tammy:** So tell us who a pregnant mother should see?

**Rachel:** You should see someone who's qualified and experienced in looking after women during their pregnancy and labour – a midwife, a nurse or a doctor. Don't rely on unqualified people in your village to provide the right kind of care for you. Go to your local health clinic or hospital and ask them for information, if you possibly can.

**Carol:** Looking back and remembering my own doctor visits, I know that it is important for a woman to go to the doctor early.

**Rachel:** You should start going to antenatal clinic as soon as you think you're pregnant. Have you been already? This is important: your health worker needs to see you very early in your pregnancy. It's also important because you might need to take extra vitamins and iron to help keep your baby healthy. Make sure you know the date your last period *started*; as they will use this to work out the date when your baby is due to be born. It's a good idea to always know how far along your pregnancy is.

**Carol:** Not too long ago many women were born in their village; would you advise a young mother now to have her baby at home in her village?

**Rachel:** I don't think it's a good idea, especially with your first baby. If you've never delivered a baby before, we don't actually know if a baby can fit through the bones of your pelvis. The baby might get stuck. If you have any problems during your labour at home, there might not be enough time to get you to a hospital for help. But if you're having your labour in the hospital, the nurses and midwives will be able to see any problems developing and quickly give you and your baby the right kind of help.

Remember that while health clinics are good and very useful, they can't always help you in an emergency like a hospital can. Even if it's not your first baby, and *all* your others have been born safely in the village, this time there could be a problem with either you or the baby, and one or both of you could die. Don't take that chance! Make sure you labour and deliver in a hospital with good emergency help, if you possibly can.

You need to think about where you'll have your baby and how you're going to get there when your labour starts. Will you need to walk? Can someone take you there? Maybe you need to save up to get a taxi, to be safe. Do you need to stay there for a few weeks before the baby's due to be born? Talk to your family and health workers about what might be best for you.

**Tammy:** Your family and the health care workers you go to all want to see a healthy baby almost as much as you do!

**Rachel:** I wonder if some of the women in your village have given you some advice about things you should and should not do while you're pregnant. Someone tried to tell me once that I shouldn't stand in a doorway while I was pregnant, or tie a knot in my apron or the baby would get stuck during labour! It's sometimes hard to tell; some of their advice is helpful, but some is confusing or even dangerous. The midwives and doctors look after pregnant women every day and have lots of training; they will know a lot more than the ladies in the village.

**Carol:** Rachel, today many moms are either on medication or might need medication during their pregnancy. What about taking medicines while you're pregnant?

**Rachel:** You need to be careful- don't take *any* medicine unless your health worker says it's ok. If anyone else tells you to drink some medicine prepared in the village, or by a traditional healer, or wants you to put something up inside of you, you should refuse. These village medicines *could* be very dangerous, both to you and your baby. If you have any questions about them, you should go and see your doctor or nurse as soon as you can. In fact, ask them to help you sort out all the advice you're getting from the village – they'll be able to tell you what is good...and what is not!

**Carol:** Are there other things you might notice that you should tell your health worker about quickly?

**Rachel:** If your baby has been moving well, maybe ten times a day, and you feel that the movements have slowed down or stopped, see your health worker to make sure the baby is ok. Sometimes, a baby can die inside the mother before it's born.

If you have fever at any time, your health worker needs to find the cause so you can be treated quickly. Some illnesses can cause the baby to be born early.

If you think your 'waters' have broken and you have a sudden gush or continuous trickle of liquid coming out, you need to be checked as soon as possible. Maybe your labour is starting; or maybe there's a problem with the pregnancy. If you feel pain in the lower part of your tummy, or low down in your back – either continuous, or 'on-and-off' – you should see your

health worker as soon as possible, even if you're only 6 or 7 months pregnant. You might be starting early labour; then they might be able to give you medicine to stop the labour; or they might get ready to care for a premature baby. If you're worried at any stage during your pregnancy, and feel that something isn't right, you should talk to your nurse or doctor.

**Tammy:** Well, we sure have talked about a lot of important things for pregnant women to remember. They need to see their health worker if there's any bleeding or fluid leaking out, or you're vomiting a lot...

**Carol:** or if the baby stops moving...

**Tammy:** ... or you have a fever, or pain, or you're not sure what to do. It is *so much better* to find out the answer to your problem than to keep worrying. Sounds like the health worker is your best friend during pregnancy!

**Rachel:** And just to finish, I strongly suggest that you write down what happens during your pregnancy, as well as some details about the birth. If you have your next baby in a different hospital, you can tell them the details of what happened, so they can care for you in your next pregnancy.

It's been so lovely to talk to you. I hope I can talk with you again.

**Tammy:** Thank you Rachel. Yes, please come again.

Hello again, and welcome back. Here on Women of Hope we've been talking to pregnant women about keeping well as they wait to become mothers. We love our babies so much, don't we, even before they're born. And God loves us even more than that. He's like the best mother and father that you could imagine.

**Carol:** We have talked before about a woman named Kate, who went to help people in a country that was damaged by wars. She made many friends there, and learned their language well. And every chance she had, she would talk to the people about God.

One day someone asked Kate why Christians say 'Our Father' when we pray. *They* believed that they must obey God's rules exactly or he would hate them and be angry with them. So,

one day when her friend's husband was rocking his small child Kate asked him, 'Do you love your child?'

'Of course, he said, He's my son,'

Then Kate asked him, 'Do you think you are greater than God? Could you do anything better than God?'

The man looked surprised and said, 'Of course not. God is the greatest.'

'Let me ask you a question then,' said Kate. One day the Lord Jesus Christ asked this question when he was teaching some men. 'If your son asks you for a fish, would you give him a snake?'

The man smiled at his son. Of course he would try to protect him from poisonous snakes, and he would give him the tasty little fish cooked on some coals.

Kate said, 'The Lord Jesus asked the men again: 'If your son asks you for an egg, would you give him a scorpion?' (Luke 11:11-12)

The father shuddered- "scorpions are dangerous, painful, I would never do that."

Then Kate asked him, 'Do you really think you can love your child more than God can love you?'

This was a new thought to this man. Of course he couldn't be a better father than God! So Kate went on to ask, 'If your son needs something, do you want him to ask you for it?' She knew this family well, and she had seen the game this father played when he came home from work. He would hide some little treat in one of his pockets, and the little boy would search his pockets, laughing, until he found it. Of course the father wanted his child to ask for what he needed.

Kate said, 'You do love your child, and that's beautiful. But God loves him even more, and he loves you. When the Lord Jesus was here on earth, he asked those questions, and then he said, 'You, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children. So how much more does God, our Father in Heaven, know how to give good gifts to us?' (Matt 7:11)

The man was really listening now. So Kate went on. 'Jesus told us to pray for the things that we need. God is wiser than we are, and he knows what's good for us. If your son asks for something that's not good, would you give it to him?'

The father laughed; because right then his little boy was crawling over to eat the food in the dog's bowl, and he pulled the child away to stop him. Of course he wouldn't give him anything he wanted- he loved him too much for that.

Kate smiled and added, 'God is even greater and more loving than you. He wants us to tell him what we need, and then trust him to give us what is good for us.'

**Tammy:** Here on Women of Hope we've been saying that God is like the best possible father and mother. Do you think of God like that?

**Carol:** Have you ever thought about what it means when Christians speak of God as our Father? We could mean that God *made* us, so he's our Father.

**Tammy:** That's true, in a way (Acts 17:28). The Bible tells us that God made us to be like him in many ways, and to be close to him (Genesis 1:27). But are we close to him? Do we act and think like he does? I don't think we do. God is perfectly good and holy, and we're not, are we? All of us have turned our backs on God in different ways. Let me read you a part of the Bible; it says: 'All of us were like sheep that were lost, each of us going our own way. But the Lord made our punishment fall on him', that is, on Jesus (Isaiah 53:6 TEV).

Have you ever seen a family where the parents make fair rules for their children to be safe, but the teenager refuses to obey his parents' rules, and gets into lots of trouble? Sometimes they run away, so that they're not part of the family home any more. Their parents still love them, but there is no closeness. They can't enjoy the warmth and happiness of home.

We humans are often like that; we are *rebellious* children who think we know better than our Father in heaven. Or we act like separated children who never talk to our Father. Or maybe we are just confused children who aren't sure that our Father loves us.

So we need to come back to God, and admit that we have rebelled, and say we are sorry. We need to admit to God that His ways are right, and he should be our Lord and Master as well as our Father. Then we find that he is waiting for us with his arms wide open to welcome us

home. We find his rules are good for us, and he is fair and just. We find his heart is full of love, and he understands us.

**Carol:** There's another wonderful verse in the Bible that says, 'As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord God has compassion on those who honour him. For he knows what we are made of, he remembers we are dust' (Psalm 103:13-14).

**Tammy:** So, God understands that we are just human, and he's always ready to forgive us and help us. He's the best Father we could ever have!

**Carol:** We need to come to God like *little* children, in some ways, and realise that we completely depend on God. But in another way, God treats us as his *grown-up* children. He expects us to be responsible for what we do, and to use our minds as we think about life. He doesn't force us to obey him, or stop loving us if we make a mistake. But we *want* to please him because we are so grateful to him. As we do this, we gradually become more like God our Father who is in heaven.

**Tammy:** Today has been filled with some good reminders. We talked about keeping healthy and seeing our health workers regularly during pregnancy.

**Carol:** ... and about how God loves you and invites you to come home to him. You're precious to him, and he's the best Father you could ever have.

**Tammy:** Maybe you have a question about something you heard today or on another visit. We would love to answer your questions.

Remember, if you think you are pregnant; go see your health care worker. And know that God loves you and invites you to come to him. We do hope you will be with us again. Have a great week filled with God's blessings.my friend!