10 STEPS *to a* LONGER *and* HEALTHIER LIFE

NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE

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We all want to be as healthy as possible. But there's so much information, it can be hard to know what's most important.

That's why the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene wants to make it simple. **TAKE CARE NEW YORK** consists of 10 steps people can take *now* to live longer, healthier lives.

This booklet tells what you can do, why it's important, and how to get help. If all of us took just some of these steps, we could prevent thousands of deaths and hundreds of thousands of illnesses and disabilities each year.

Sincerely,

THOMAS R. FRIEDEN, M.D., M.P.H.
COMMISSIONER

Take
Care!

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1. HAVE A REGULAR DOCTOR
OR OTHER HEALTH CARE PROVIDER

GET REGULAR MEDICAL CARE TO HELP STAY HEALTHY.

Regular check-ups are important. By working with your doctor you can prevent health problems or find them early. It's important to feel comfortable with your doctor so you can talk about *any* health issue, including sexual health and alcohol and drug use.

WHAT TO DO

- If you don't have a regular doctor, get one through your health plan.
- Many families qualify for free or low-cost health insurance through Medicaid, Child Health Plus, or Family Health Plus. Almost all children are eligible, regardless of income or immigration status. Children under 21 who are enrolled in Medicaid can get necessary screenings, treatment, assistance with appointments, and transportation through the Child/Teen Health Program.
- People without health coverage do not have to go without good medical care! Call 311 to see how to get a doctor at a public or community health clinic.
- Keep all your medical appointments.

MORE INFORMATION

To find out if you're eligible for free or low-cost health insurance, call HealthStat or the Child/Teen Health Program at 311.

2. BE TOBACCO-FREE

QUIT SMOKING AND AVOID SECOND-HAND SMOKE TO PROLONG YOUR LIFE AND PROTECT THOSE AROUND YOU.

Smoking is the #1 cause of preventable death in New York City, killing 10,000 New Yorkers every year. On average, smokers die 14 years younger than non-smokers. Smoking increases a person's risk of heart disease, stroke, many cancers (lung, mouth, throat, and esophagus), blindness, Alzheimer's disease, and much more. Smoking causes many problems in pregnancy, including miscarriage, premature labor, and low birthweight.

Second-hand smoke is also dangerous. It causes cancer, heart disease, and many other illnesses. Babies with a parent who smokes are more likely to die from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. And babies and children who live with second-hand smoke are much more likely to have asthma, bronchitis, ear infections, and pneumonia.

If you smoke, quitting is the single most important thing you can do for your health.

WHAT TO DO

If you smoke, get help to quit.

When you quit, you greatly and rapidly lower your risk of heart disease and stroke, and steadily reduce your risk of lung cancer. *These tips have helped many people:*

- Prepare in advance. Write down your reasons for quitting.
- Talk to your doctor. To *double* your chance of success, consider using a nicotine replacement product, such as the patch or gum, and medication such as Zyban.

- Get a "quitting buddy," either another smoker who wants to quit, or a non-smoker you can talk to when you need support.
- Pick a quit date. Prepare for it by throwing out ashtrays and lighters. When the day comes, get rid of all your cigarettes.
- Avoid anything that triggers your cravings, including alcohol, caffeine, and stress. It also helps to stay away from smokers for awhile.
- Drink lots of water.
- Exercise to relieve stress, raise your spirits, and improve your health. A 30-minute, brisk walk at least 4 days a week is enough for many people.
- Remember that withdrawal symptoms, such as irritability, cravings, and trouble concentrating, are *temporary*. Nicotine replacement products and other medications greatly ease withdrawal symptoms.

Stay away—and keep children away—from second-hand smoke.

- If you smoke, quit now.
- Establish a smoke-free home.
- Don't let anybody smoke around your children.

MORE INFORMATION

Talk to your doctor. For free help to quit smoking, call 311 and ask for the Smokers' Quitline.

3. KEEP YOUR HEART HEALTHY

KEEP YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE, CHOLESTEROL, AND WEIGHT AT HEALTHY LEVELS TO PREVENT HEART DISEASE, STROKE, DIABETES, AND OTHER DISEASES.

High blood pressure and high cholesterol cause heart disease and stroke. People can often improve their blood pressure and cholesterol levels through a combination of more physical activity, eating a healthier diet, and not smoking. When these lifestyle changes don't result in enough improvement, safe and effective medications are available.

Being overweight or obese also causes serious problems, including diabetes, heart disease, stroke, arthritis, and many cancers (of the colon, breast, uterus, cervix, prostate, ovaries, esophagus, stomach, pancreas, gallbladder, kidney, and liver). But losing even a few pounds and being a little more physically active can significantly reduce these problems. People can lower their risk of diabetes by more than half with modest weight loss and regular exercise.

WHAT TO DO

"Know your numbers" —
Get your blood pressure and cholesterol checked regularly.

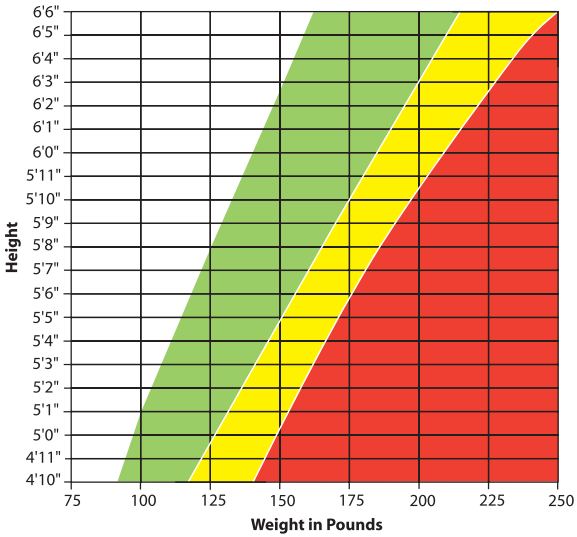
- High blood pressure and high cholesterol have no symptoms. You won't know you have a problem unless you get screened regularly.
- Normal blood pressure is below 120/80.
- Desirable cholesterol levels are below 200 total and above 60 HDL ("good") cholesterol.
- Talk to your doctor about the levels that are right for you.

Increase physical activity.

- *Physical activity improves your health even if you don't lose weight!*
- At least 30 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (such as a brisk walk) at least 4 days every week reduces blood pressure, cholesterol, and weight.
- You don't have to go to the gym or buy equipment.
- Choose activities you like to increase the chance you'll stick with them.
- Fit more exercise into your day. Take several flights of stairs instead of the elevator whenever you can. Get off the subway one stop early. Walk to a bus stop a few blocks away. Walk briskly instead of strolling.

ARE YOU OVERWEIGHT?

To find out, locate the point where your height and weight meet.



To calculate BMI, visit http://nhlbisupport.com/bmi/

HEALTHY WEIGHT
(BMI of 18.5 to less than 25)

OVERWEIGHT
(BMI of 25 to less than 30)

OBESE
(BMI of 30 and above)

Adapted from: Eat, Drink and Be Healthy: The Harvard Medical School Guide to Healthy Eating (2002)

Eat a healthy diet and maintain a healthy weight.

- Eat at least 5 servings of fruits or vegetables every day.
- Drink only diet sodas, if any.
- The Body Mass Index (BMI) uses height and weight to determine if you're overweight. Adults should try to keep their BMI under 25 and definitely below 30 (*see chart*).
- For gradual, sustained weight loss, stay away from fast food and eat smaller, healthier meals.
- Don't eat while you watch TV!
- Choose smaller servings. Most people overestimate a "serving." A serving of meat is the size of a deck of cards; a serving of cheese, the size of your thumb.
- Over time, even a small drop in calories consumed and a little more physical activity can reduce weight, prevent weight gain, and help you live a healthier, longer life .

MORE INFORMATION

Call 311 or visit nyc.gov/parks for fitness programs.

4. KNOW YOUR HIV STATUS

GET TESTED FOR HIV. REDUCE RISKY BEHAVIORS AND USE CONDOMS TO PROTECT YOURSELF AND OTHERS.

More than 100,000 New Yorkers are living with HIV, *but as many as 1 in 4 don't know they're infected.* If you have HIV, it's important to know. By knowing your HIV status, you can protect yourself, anyone you are having sex with, and, if you're pregnant or planning pregnancy, your baby.

WHAT TO DO

Get tested.

- Anyone who's ever been sexually active, or ever injected drugs (even if only once) should be tested for HIV.
- If you're infected, you can get medical treatment to feel better and live longer. You can also protect others from becoming infected.
- If you're pregnant or planning pregnancy, knowing your HIV status can save your baby's life. Without medication, a mother can pass HIV to her baby. But if you have HIV and get medication, you can improve your own health and greatly reduce the chance that your baby will get infected.
- If you're HIV-positive, tell anyone you're going to have sex with *before* you have sex (*even if they don't ask!*).

Protect yourself and others.

- Not having sex and not shooting drugs are the only ways to be 100% certain you won't get infected with HIV.
- *If you are sexually active,* you can reduce your risk of getting or spreading HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) by having sex only in a mutually monogamous relationship with a partner you're sure is not infected.

- If you are having sex outside of such a relationship, you can protect yourself and others by:
  - Always using a latex condom whenever you have sex – vaginal, anal, or oral.
  - Never having anal sex without a condom. Unprotected anal sex is the greatest sexual risk for spreading HIV.
  - Limiting the number of people you have sex with. The more partners you have, the higher your risk. Having sex with people you don't know greatly increases your risk.
  - Avoiding alcohol and drugs when you have sex. Being high makes it much harder to remember to use condoms.
- If you shoot drugs, use a new sterile needle and works every time. Never share your needle or your works. If you have to share, clean the kit with bleach.

MORE INFORMATION

Talk to your doctor. Or call 311 for:

- Information on where to get tested for HIV and other STDs.
- Help to notify your partners if you have HIV. Ask for CNAP (Contact Notification Assistance Program).
- Help with a drug or alcohol problem. Or call 1-800-LifeNet (1-800-543-3638).
- A list of syringe exchange programs.

5. GET HELP FOR DEPRESSION

DEPRESSION CAN BE TREATED.

TALK TO YOUR DOCTOR OR A MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL.

If left untreated, depression can be devastating, *but depression can be treated* with medication and therapy. It's normal to feel "down" once in a while. But if the sadness won't let up, or if a person loses interest in things, it might be depression. Alcohol and other substance abuse can make depression worse.

WHAT TO DO

Talk to your doctor or a mental health professional if for 2 weeks or more you:

- Have little interest or pleasure in things.
- Feel sad, anxious, guilty, or hopeless.
- Sleep too much or too little.
- Have difficulty concentrating.
- Feel slowed down (or speeded up).
- Think about dying or hurting yourself.

Recognize depression in your child.

- Children and adolescents often cannot communicate feelings directly. They need parents and other adults to notice a problem and get them help if necessary.
- Children and adolescents may show different signs of depression, including irritability, emotional withdrawal, behavior problems, falling grades, and use of alcohol and other drugs, including tobacco.

MORE INFORMATION

Talk to your doctor or call 1-800-LifeNet (1-800-543-3638), or call 311 and ask for LifeNet.

6. LIVE FREE OF DEPENDENCE ON ALCOHOL AND DRUGS

GET HELP TO STOP ALCOHOL AND DRUG ABUSE. RECOVERY IS POSSIBLE.

Most adults are able to drink safely, and many may benefit from *moderate* alcohol consumption. "Moderate" means *no more than 1 or 2 drinks a day, and never more than 4.* The beneficial health effects of moderate drinking include one-third less heart attack and stroke.

Heavy drinking can kill you, and some people (especially people under 21, pregnant women, and people who are driving) shouldn't drink at all. Alcohol and drug abuse are diseases that can be treated.

WHAT TO DO

Know how to spot a problem.

If your drinking is worrying you, your family, or your friends, try the **CAGE** test. There may be a problem if the answer to *any one* of these questions is "yes".

Have you ever:

- Thought you should **C**ut down on drinking?
- Become **A**nnoyed when people criticize your drinking?
- Felt scared, bad, or **G**uilty about your drinking?
- Taken an **E**ye-opener drink to feel better in the morning?

A man may have a drinking problem if he consumes more than 14 drinks a week, or 5 in one sitting. A woman may have a drinking problem if she consumes more than 7 drinks a week, or 4 in one sitting.

Some people shouldn't drink at all.

- Anyone under legal drinking age.
- Women who are pregnant or planning pregnancy.
- Anyone who is driving.

Recovery is possible.

- For a substance abuser, admitting the problem is often very difficult. This is called "denial," and is characteristic of the disease.
- Attempts to get and stay clean and sober, even with relapses, eventually become building blocks for a new life in recovery.
- People in recovery often need ongoing support. Many treatment options are available – speak with a doctor or substance abuse counselor.

MORE INFORMATION

- Talk to your doctor, or call 1-800-LifeNet (1-800-534-3638), or call 311 and ask for LifeNet.
- National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information: www.samsha.org or 1-800-729-6686.
- Alcoholics Anonymous: www.nyintergroup.org or 212-647-1680.
- Alanon and Alateen: www.nycalanon.org or 212-941-0094.

7. GET CHECKED FOR CANCER

COLONOSCOPY, PAP SMEARS, AND MAMMOGRAMS SAVE LIVES.

Cancer kills nearly 15,000 New Yorkers every year. Many of these deaths could be prevented if people at risk were properly screened. Screening has been shown to prevent death from 3 major cancers – colon, breast, and cervical.

WHAT TO DO

Prevent Colon Cancer

Colon cancer can almost always be prevented or cured if detected early.

If you're 50 or older, or at high risk, get a colonoscopy to prevent colon cancer.

- *Everyone 50 and older should get a colonoscopy*. More than 90% of colon cancers occur in this age group.
- *Colonoscopy is also recommended for people with a family history of the disease.* Most people with colon cancer do *not* have a family history of the disease. But having a parent or sibling with colon polyps, colon cancer, or (possibly) other cancers puts a person at high risk. People with a family history should be tested *before* age 50 – talk to your doctor.

Colonoscopy tests for – and can also prevent – colon cancer.

- Colonoscopy examines the entire colon. It is safe and painless.
- Colonoscopy detects more than 95% of early colon cancer.
- If a polyp is found, it can usually be removed painlessly during the test *before* it develops into cancer.
- Colonoscopy is usually needed only every 10 years.

While not as effective as colonoscopy, there are other tests for colon cancer.

- The *Fecal Occult Blood Test (FOBT)* is an acceptable alternative to colonoscopy for people who are not at high risk for colon cancer. If the FOBT is positive, it should be followed up with colonoscopy. The FOBT needs to be done every year.
- There are other tests for colon cancer. Any test is much better than none!

Risk factors for colon cancer:

In addition to being 50 or older, or having a family history of the disease, the following also raise the risk of colon cancer:

- Smoking. Smokers are much more likely than non-smokers to die of colon cancer.
- Having a sedentary lifestyle, being overweight, and eating a high-fat, low-fiber diet.
- Having an African-American or Eastern European Jewish ancestry.
- Having ulcerative colitis or Crohn's disease.

To reduce your risk:

The following also lower the risk of heart disease, diabetes, stroke, and some other cancers.

- Stop smoking *(see page 5)*.
- Exercise regularly *(see page 8)*.
- Maintain a healthy weight, and eat more fruits and vegetables *(see page 8)*.

Prevent Cervical Cancer

Routine Pap smears are strongly recommended.

- To prevent cervical cancer, all women 18 to 65 who are sexually active and have not had a hysterectomy should get a Pap smear every 1 to 3 years, depending on their risk factors and past test results.
- Screening is no longer recommended for women older than 65 with recent normal Pap smear results and no major risk factors for cervical cancer.

Prevent Breast Cancer

Women 40 and older need regular mammograms.

- All women aged 40 and older should have a mammogram every 1 to 2 years.
- Women with a family history of breast cancer should seek expert medical advice about whether to begin mammograms *before* age 40 and how often to get screened.

MORE INFORMATION

- On where to get cancer screenings: talk to your doctor or call 311.
- National Cancer Institute: www.cancer.gov/cancer_information/cancer.

8. GET THE IMMUNIZATIONS YOU NEED

EVERYONE NEEDS TO BE VACCINATED, REGARDLESS OF AGE.

Immunizations aren't only for children. In fact, in New York City and throughout the U.S., 99% of the deaths that could be prevented by vaccination now occur in adults, not children. All people – infants and children, adolescents, adults, and older people – need regular immunizations to stay healthy.

WHAT TO DO

Make sure your children are immunized.

- Vaccinations protect children against serious childhood diseases, including: measles, mumps, rubella, polio, tetanus, diphtheria, whooping cough (pertussis) , *H. influenzae* (Hib), hepatitis B, chicken pox, and pneumococcal disease.
- You will need proof of immunization to register your child for day care or school, for the WIC program, and for college and job applications when your child is grown.
- Make sure your children's immunizations are up-to-date. Keep a record, and bring it every time you go to the doctor or clinic.
- Whenever your child gets an immunization, a report is sent to the Citywide Immunization Registry. For a free copy of your child's immunization record, call 311 or visit nyc.gov/health/cir.

Protect yourself, too.

Every year, thousands of New Yorkers are hospitalized for flu and pneumonia. *And every year, more than 2,000 die,* even though these diseases are largely preventable with shots. Anyone can get the flu, so almost everyone can benefit from a flu shot.

People at high risk of complications from the flu should always get a flu shot, including:

- All people age 50 and older. If you're 65 or older, a flu shot can keep you out of the hospital and save your life.
- Residents of nursing homes and other long-term-care facilities.
- Pregnant women.
- Children and teenagers (2 to 18 years old) on long-term aspirin therapy.
- All children 6 to 23 months of age. (Babies under 6 months can get the flu, but they are too young for a flu shot.)
- People with long-term health problems, such as diabetes, lung disease (including asthma), heart or kidney disease, sickle cell anemia, or immune system problems (including people with HIV/AIDS, and those being treated for cancer).

Other immunizations:

- Everyone 65 and older and people with long-term health problems should get a pneumonia vaccine once for life-long protection.
- If you've never had chicken pox, you should be vaccinated against it.
- If you were born after 1956, you should be vaccinated against measles, mumps, and rubella if you haven't already had these diseases or these shots.
- If you've had fewer than 3 tetanus shots in your lifetime, you should get the whole series. Everyone should get a tetanus booster shot every 10 years.
- Talk to your doctor to see if you should get the hepatitis B vaccine.

MORE INFORMATION

Talk to your doctor. Or call 311 to get a vaccination schedule for your children or for information on where you and your children can get flu shots and other immunizations. Information is also available at nyc.gov/health/cir.

9. MAKE YOUR HOME SAFE AND HEALTHY

HAVE A HOME THAT IS FREE FROM VIOLENCE AND FREE OF ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS.

Help Is Available for Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is the leading cause of serious injury to women. Most victims are women who are abused by male partners, but men can be victims, too. It doesn't matter whether the couple is married, living together, dating, separated, gay, or straight. Domestic violence is a crime.

Physical violence is against the law.

If someone hits, slaps, kicks, pushes, or restrains you, this is physical abuse. Using or threatening to use weapons (guns, knives, belts, etc.,) is also abuse.

Abuse is about power and control.

It can also be psychological, emotional, or sexual, including:

- Isolation (keeping you from family or friends, preventing you from going to work or school).
- Intimidation (insulting you, calling you names).
- Threats (to hurt or kill you or your children, family, or friends).
- Cruelty (denying you food, sleep, or medical care; abusing or killing your pets; destroying your clothes).
- Withholding support (taking your money; denying you access to bank accounts and credit cards).
- Sexual abuse (forcing sex; preventing you from using birth control or using condoms to protect against sexually transmitted diseases).

WHAT TO DO

FOR EMERGENCIES CALL 911.

You don't have to wait for an emergency. For information and help 24-hours-a-day, call the city's toll-free, confidential Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-621-HOPE (1-800-621-4673). Or call 311 and ask for the Hotline. You can get help even if you are poor or undocumented.

You can get help with:

- Counseling or other social services.
- A court order of protection or an arrest warrant.
- Shelters to get away from an abuser.
- Leaving the relationship, temporarily or permanently.

MORE INFORMATION

- Domestic Violence Hotline (24-hours-a-day): 1-800-621-HOPE (1-800-621-4673) or call 311.
- Violence Intervention Program (Spanish and English): 212-410-9080.
- Arab-American Family Support Center: 718-643-8000.
- New York Asian Women's Center: 212-732-5230 or 1-888-888-7702.
- SAKHI for South Asian Women: 212-714-9153.
- NYC Gay and Lesbian Anti-Violence Project: 212-807-0197.
- For Emergencies Call 911.

Prevent Childhood Lead Poisoning

Many older homes in New York City contain lead paint, which can peel, chip, or crumble to dust. Young children can swallow lead dust and paint chips when they put their hands and toys in their mouths. Lead poisoning can impair children's health, learning, and behavior. Children under 6 are most vulnerable.

WHAT TO DO

- If you have a child under 6 and live in a building with 3 or more apartments, we recommend that you ask your landlord to inspect and safely fix peeling paint. Landlords are required to do this at no cost to tenants.
- Make sure your child is tested for lead at 1 and 2 years of age, as the law requires.
- Keep children away from peeling paint and renovation work.
- Wash toys and other things that children put in their mouths. Wash children's hands often, especially before they eat and before they go to sleep.
- Use a wet mop or wet cloth to clean floors, window sills, furniture, and other dusty places.
- Make sure children eat 3 healthy meals a day. Foods rich in iron, calcium, and vitamin C (such as meat, broccoli, spinach, cheese, milk, and citrus fruits) help prevent the absorption of lead.
- Use only *cold* tap water for drinking, cooking, or making baby formula. Hot tap water may contain more lead. Run the water for cooking and drinking until it is cold.

MORE INFORMATION

Call 311 or visit nyc.gov/health:

- For information about childhood lead poisoning.
- To report a lead-based paint hazard, if you have complained to your building's owner about peeling paint and it has not been repaired.

10. HAVE A HEALTHY BABY

PLANNING PREGNANCY HELPS ENSURE A HEALTHY MOTHER AND A HEALTHY BABY.

Planning pregnancy—deciding if and when to become pregnant—can prevent many problems and help ensure that your baby gets the best possible start. Make sure you're as healthy as possible *before* you get pregnant.

WHAT TO DO

Plan your pregnancy.

- Always use birth control until you're ready to get pregnant. Many safe and effective methods are available, and one of them is right for you.
- Ideally, there should be at least 18 months between pregnancies to give your body a chance to recover.
- Get regular checkups and pelvic exams. Make sure you're tested for HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases *(see page 10)*.
- Smoking can make it harder to get pregnant and harder to have a healthy baby *(see page 5)*.
- If you're trying to get pregnant, don't smoke, drink , or use drugs. Alcohol and other drugs, such as cocaine, cause miscarriages, birth defects, and developmental and other serious problems *(see page 13)*.
- To prevent birth defects, women who may become pregnant should take a daily multi-vitamin with at least 400 micrograms of folic acid.

Get early and regular prenatal care.

- See your doctor as soon as you think you're pregnant. Regular prenatal care beginning early in pregnancy prevents problems.
- If you smoke or use alcohol or drugs, get help to stop.

- To prevent birth defects, take a daily multi-vitamin with at least 400 micrograms of folic acid.

After your baby is born:

- Breast milk is best. Breast-feed your baby for at least 4 to 6 months, unless you're HIV-positive or have a problem with drugs or alcohol.
- To develop properly, your baby needs to be touched often, held close, and handled gently all the time.
- No matter how tired, angry, or frustrated you feel, never shake or treat your baby roughly. Shaking your baby could kill your baby or cause permanent and devastating brain injury.
- Reduce the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome by putting your baby "back to sleep." Babies should sleep on their backs, alone, on a firm mattress without pillows, toys, or loose blankets.
- Prevent lead poisoning, which can impair your child's health, learning, and behavior. *(See page 22.)*

MORE INFORMATION

- Talk to your doctor, or call 311 and ask for Women's Healthline.
- For free help to quit smoking, call 311 and ask for the Smokers' Quitline.
- Pregnant smokers: call the Great Start Quitline 1-866-66-START (1-866-667-8278).
- For help with emotional or substance-abuse problems, call 1-800-LifeNet (1-800- 534-3638), or call 311 and ask for LifeNet.
- If you feel you can't cope with your child, call the Parent Hotline anytime, day or night, at 1-800-342-7472.

have a healthy baby!