

[ BODY OF EVIDENCE ]

## Mother Courage

Pregnancy is a time for forward thinking.

By Gina Ryder

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*"PARENTING BEGINS when the baby is in utero," says Jennifer Usdan McBride, who believes her lifestyle had a direct effect on her child's well-being. As a producer of an online restaurant guide, she's a health-conscious cuisine connoisseur. "It was empowering knowing that I had control over the health and growth of my child. That I could eat something that would potentially help her develop was amazing, but it was also a little scary." In the early stages of pregnancy, she found pleasure in prenatal yoga, frequent walks, adequate rest, cooking nutritious food, and the occasional malted milk shake, one of her favorite indulgences.*

### ■ WATER BREAK

Don't skip the mommy-to-be swim meet. Participating in pool exercises like aquarobics eases labor pain. Pregnant women who attend thrice-weekly water aerobics sessions request fewer painkilling meds during labor, possibly due to increased beta-endorphins.

### ■ FERTILE BUT FORGETFUL

Everyday plans like lunch dates and work obligations are easy to overlook, especially when overbooked. But being pregnant makes to-do lists even harder to check off. That's because remembering to remember is harder while baby bearing, and even for several months afterward. This may be nature's way of focusing new mothers on the arriving stranger. Mothers should rely on external reminders. Write notes to yourself



and post them in obvious places. Set alarms if you need to. Your best intentions will be hard to carry out.

### ■ EATING HABITS FOR TWO

Obese and diabetic mothers produce fatter babies. Now there's evidence that a pregnant woman's McDonald's indulgences may cause her child to overeat later in life. Short-term exposure to high-fat diets in utero changes fetal brains in ways that heighten hunger. Mothers who consume a high-fat diet give birth to children who eat more, weigh more, and begin puberty earlier, thanks to an increase in appetite-stimulating neurons.

### ■ LULLABY MOMMY

Listening to music regularly for at least half an hour a day can reduce stress, anxiety, and depression in pregnant women after just two weeks. If you crave a peaceful pre- and postnatal life, create a playlist of tunes with a tempo that matches your heart rate—between 60 and 80 beats per minute.

### ■ BABY BLUES

Preterm delivery is the leading cause of infant mortality and costs Americans \$26 billion a year. Its causes are little understood, but researchers now know that depression in pregnant women dramatically escalates the probability of early delivery. The risk increases with the gravity of despair. Mood disorders interfere with neuroendocrine pathways, which influence placental function. So don't delay seeking treatment.