

# **I AM PREGNANT!**

## **WHAT HAPPENS AT THE CLINIC**



### **NAPULE'S STORY**

Napule has three children. She works in a home at Sandton, a rich area in Johannesburg. She lives in a room at the back. Napule told us the story of her pregnancy. She said "I went to a doctor for monthly-check ups when I was pregnant. I thought everything would be fine because I was taking care of myself. But my baby was born sick. And the doctor who saw my baby told me that this sickness could have been stopped while the baby was inside me. If the doctor had taken my blood and examined me inside my vagina he would have seen that I had an infection. He could have given me injections to make me and the baby better. When my baby was born he had to stay in hospital for many weeks. He is now better. But he is a weak baby. And not as big as my other babies." Napule felt angry. She said, "Why can't the doctors give us better care?"

### **WE NEED TO FIGHT FOR BETTER HEALTH CARE**

It is true that we need to have better health care. There are many problems in health. Very often there are too few clinics and very few doctors. Sometimes the clinics are too far away. Sometimes they are there but they are overcrowded. The time you get with the doctor is rushed. And you don't get a chance to ask questions. Sometimes we can't get off from work to go to the clinic. Most often we do not get proper care. All these are things we must fight for.

Napule was able to get to a doctor on her one day off. But Napule's doctor had only felt her stomach and given her injections at each visit. This could not tell the doctor that there was a sickness inside her that could be passed on to her baby. The doctor should have tested her blood. The doctor should have tested her urine. He should have

examined inside her vagina. He should have taken her blood pressure. Without doing all these things the doctor would not be able to tell if she and her baby were really well.

Napule did not know this. She said, "I thought I was doing the best for my baby by going to the doctor. if only I had known what to ask the doctor."

It is not easy to talk to most doctors. They don't expect you to ask questions and they usually treat you like children. But we have a right to understand the things that are happening in our bodies. And we have a right to make sure that we are getting proper treatment. We need proper ante natal care. This is the name given to the care needed in the time before a woman delivers her baby. If we know the things that should be done at pregnancy check-ups we can make sure that the doctors do these things. We can take a part in seeing to it that we get proper care. After all it is your body and the doctor is working for you.

It is important to go to the clinic as soon as you know you are pregnant. Then you can start getting care from early in your pregnancy. We will look at the most important things that should be done at the clinic to make sure that you and your baby are well while you are pregnant.

### **GENERAL EXAMINATION - checking your whole body**

At the first visit the doctor examines your body all over. She examines your breasts to make sure you will be able to breast feed your baby. She checks your weight. She checks that you are breathing well. And that your heart is beating properly. She checks that your teeth are alright. Teeth often become bad when you are pregnant. If the doctor finds a problem with any of these things she will send you to the hospital for more tests. The doctor will also ask when you had your last period and from this date and the examination she will tell you when your baby is likely to be born.



**Examining the breast**

### **URINE TEST**

Everytime you come to the clinic your urine is tested. It is checked for infection which is common in pregnancy. It is checked for sugar. Some women get sugar diabetes when they are pregnant. This can make the baby very sick. The urine is checked for protein. If there is protein in your urine and if you have high blood pressure together this will be a sign of preeclampsia. The doctor will then put you on treatment.

### **BLOOD TESTS**

There are different blood groups. The clinic needs to know your blood group. And whether your blood is weak. The sickness that makes your blood weak is called anaemia. Anaemia makes a woman look very pale, feel very weak, and have trouble breathing when she walks. If you have anaemia, the doctor will ask you to take iron tablets to help. The blood is tested for syphilis. This sickness gets passed between men and women when they have sex. It makes both the mother and baby very sick. So if you have syphilis then the doctor will give you an injection which will get rid of it.



Examining the womb

### EXAMINING YOUR WOMB

On the first visit the doctor examines the inside of your vagina with a metal instrument called a speculum. She looks at the opening to your womb which is called the cervix. She scrapes the cervix with a wooden scraper and wipes this on a piece of glass. This is called a pap smear. This is done to find out if there is any cancer in the cervix.

If there is a bad discharge the doctor might take a swab from your vagina. A swab is a piece of cotton wool on a long wooden stick. The discharge sticks to the cotton wool. It is put onto a piece of glass, and it is sent for tests. The germs grow. If you have an infection the doctor knows what medicine to give you to make you better.

Then the size of your womb is measured. If you are early in the pregnancy the doctor feels the womb with one hand in the vagina and one hand on your tummy. If you are more than four months the doctor can feel the size of your womb just by feeling your tummy.



Taking blood pressure.

### BLOOD PRESSURE

Blood pressure measures how hard your blood is flowing through your veins. The doctor takes your blood pressure by tying a tight strap around your arm. She pumps it to make it tighter. And then she slowly lets it down. Some women have high blood pressure at the start of their pregnancy. They must take tablets all the time. Other women get high blood pressure at the end of their pregnancy. This is called preeclampsia and can be very dangerous for both mother and baby. If it is not treated the baby may die, and the mother can have bad fits.

These are the main things that need to be done while you are pregnant. If your doctor or clinic is not doing these things ask them why not. It is our right to lead healthy lives and to have healthy babies.