



Carol Weisman (left) and Marianne Hillemeier are leading a central Pennsylvania study to improve women's health.

Women and Pregnancy

For many years, health professionals believed prenatal care was the answer to ensuring healthy babies, but the problem of preterm and low-birth-weight babies continues to grow.

That's why Dr. Carol Weisman, professor of health evaluation sciences and obstetrics and gynecology at the Penn State College of Medicine, with funding from the Pennsylvania Department of Health, organized a team from Penn State and external institutions to study the health of central Pennsylvania women and design a way to improve pregnancy outcomes by ensuring that women are healthier when they become pregnant.

Central Pennsylvania was selected for the study because it has received little attention in prior research. Although people may assume that women in rural areas have fewer health problems, the survey of 2,600 women revealed that women in central Pennsylvania have similar risks for adverse pregnancy outcomes as women in other areas. Health problems before pregnancy can lead to premature birth and low-birth-weight babies, which can cause infant death or long-term health problems in the babies.

The team used the survey results to plan an intervention program for women, ages 18 to 35 who are not pregnant but may become pregnant in the future. Organizers are recruiting 1,000 women to participate in the test of this program. So far, more than 150 women have participated in educational sessions focusing on nutrition, physical activity, effects of alcohol and tobacco use, and stress management. ▣