

Powerful Patient 2009, week 38

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Nine Healthy Months

Women are the primary decision-makers about health care for their families. The leading high-risk pregnancy doctor in the U.S. and advocate for women's health, Dr. Charles Hux, speaks out on behalf of the millions of women who will be affected by healthcare reform. He will speak about reproductive health, obesity, diabetes, and other important questions.



Dr. Charles Hux

1) About our Guests

Dr. Charles Hux attended Case Western Reserve School of Medicine and completed his residency in obstetrics and gynecology and a fellowship in maternal-fetal medicine at Thomas Jefferson University. He received a master's degree in genetics from Rutgers University. He is one of only about 50 high risk specialists in the US that treats and/or operates on the fetus in the womb. He maintains a private practice in New Jersey and is primarily affiliated with Monmouth Medical Center in Long Branch, NJ. His articles have appeared in American Journal of Obstetrics/Gynecology, Prenatal Diagnosis, and the New England Journal of Medicine and Genetics.

A well-known media resource, Dr. Hux has been interviewed on national and regional television, quoted in various newspapers and has talked on topics of pregnancy at over 300 conferences to both physicians and the general public. He is for the last eight years, the current resident "multiples doctor" on The Learning Channel's "A Baby Story."

He is the author of the new book, *Nine Healthy Months*, the first book in the 21st Century Pregnancy Series.

To contact Dr. Hux, see his practice page at <http://huxmd.yourmd.com/>

2) Why does the United States have such a high rate of infant mortality?

In Japan and Sweden, only one baby in a thousand dies in early infancy. In the United States, more than seven babies in a thousand dies in early infancy. And we are getting worse. In 2005

we were the 29th country in the world, tied with Poland. Today we are 37th in the world, tied with a number of third-world countries, the worst of all the industrialized nations of the world.

At least half of infant deaths are due to early delivery. Babies who are born prematurely do not have lungs and organs fully developed, and struggle to survive in the air.

Why? What are Japan and Sweden doing that we are not doing? This is the core of our conversation with Dr. Hux. What can we do to take better care of mothers, and to raise our rate of success in having healthy children?

Dr. Hux lists a number of differences between the practices in these other countries and our own. Some of the top issues are:

- They move more. Even 90 minutes a week of walking makes all the difference in the world in the health of a pregnant woman. Americans are much more sedentary.
- They eat less. Americans eat too much food, three to four times the amount of food eaten by people of the same weight in most other countries. Women who are overweight are more likely to have problems during pregnancy, and their babies are at risk.
- They get good prenatal care. Women in America who do not have health care coverage do not go for prenatal care. This is a huge problem, one we hope healthcare reform will begin to make go away.
- Teenagers also get good prenatal care. In America, pregnant teens too often hide out, deny their pregnancy, and do not go for prenatal care. Teens are at particularly high risk for having babies born early, often with physical and mental disabilities.

Prenatal care is essential in monitoring the health of the mother, and also monitoring the development of the fetus. If there is any problem, it is good to identify the problem early so that corrective steps can be taken in time to prevent lifelong damage to the baby.

Dr. Hux points out too that too many women still smoke. Smoking is extremely damaging to the infant – more so even than heroin. Smoking increases the risk of asthma, low birth weight, early delivery, and a wide variety of possible damage to internal organs.

Dr. Hux's book, *Nine Healthy Months*, helps women understand what is happening to their bodies, and how they can support their bodies in staying healthy throughout the pregnancy, and can get the baby off to the best possible start in life.

For women who have disabilities, or who may have a genetic risk factor that might be passed to the baby, ideally the prospective parents should consult a genetic counselor and/or a high-risk pregnancy doctor before getting pregnant, to make sure that it is safe for the mother to carry a child for nine months and to determine whether there are ways of reducing the risks.

Of course, not all pregnancies are planned. During the pregnancy, it is even more essential to have good prenatal care, and possibly to consult with a high-risk pregnancy doctor like him. All possible risk factors should be discussed, so that if something comes up during the pregnancy the

obstetrician and any medical specialists involved in the mother's care will know what is going on and can swing into action to fix the problem and protect both the mother and the child.