Health Headlines

Low Folic Acid Creates Risk for Babies
Mom's lifestyle habits in early pregnancy play a major role in the health of their babies. A study showed that women who have low folic acid levels, smoke, or have high blood pressure in early pregnancy had babies that were smaller in the first trimester of pregnancy, leading to a higher risk of preterm birth and low birth weight. Low folic acid levels can also lead to major birth defects of the baby's brain and spine. Women should take folic acid one month before and during pregnancy to have a healthy baby. (BusinessWeek, 2.9.10) Read more about folic acid.

New Test for Shaken Baby Syndrome
When babies are brought to the hospital crying, fussy, or vomiting, doctors commonly think they have the flu or another illness. These can also be signs of Shaken Baby Syndrome, caused by a form of child abuse where the baby is violently shaken, causing the brain to bounce against the skull. While damage may not be visible on the outside, serious injuries can occur, even death. A team of researchers are developing a quick blood test to detect chemicals in the body that are released when the brain is injured. A positive test would mean a child would have a high-tech follow-up to check for injury right away. (KABC, 1.22.10) Read more about Shaken Baby Syndrome.

Health of Counties
General health and the rate of premature death can be tied to where you live. The least healthy counties tend to be poor and rural, and the healthiest ones tend to be urban/suburban and upper-income. A new report shows determining factors such as smoking, obesity, binge drinking, unemployment rates, childhood poverty, air pollution and access to grocery stores play a role in the health outcomes of communities. (Associated Press, 2.16.10) Find your county's health ranking here.

Weight Gain in First Trimester Linked to Gestational Diabetes
The first trimester in a pregnancy is a critical time for weight gain – it can increase the risk for gestational diabetes, a type of diabetes that starts during pregnancy. Women who gained between 0.6 pounds and 4 pounds per week in the first trimester had an 80% higher risk of gestational diabetes, including an increased risk for early delivery and C-section, and greater possibility for the babies to become obese or develop Type 2 diabetes later in life. Gestational diabetes can be controlled through proper diet and exercise; insulin shots may be needed in some cases. (LA Times, 2.23.10) Read more about diabetes and gestational diabetes.

Real People, Real Lives
Five Reasons to Celebrate
Kristin Molini has a lot to celebrate in the new year. She is on the road to recovery after five organ transplants - liver, stomach, pancreas, and small and large intestines. For years, 22-year old Kristin suffered from a rare medical condition called intestinal dysmotility until a match for the five organs was found in a six-year old boy who died of a traumatic injury. Only 300 similar operations have been performed worldwide. Although it may be a tough road ahead, doctors say Kristin is headed for a complete recovery. (NY Daily News, 1.1.10) Read more about organ donation.

The Superwoman Syndrome
Laurie Besden, an attorney, began popping pills to help her study for the bar exam. She landed a prestigious job and worked up to 20 pills a day to help her stay on top. She figured out how to call in her own prescriptions and used false names to impersonate doctors. Laurie was arrested five times before she was ultimately convicted for prescription fraud and jailed for almost a year. Almost 7.5 million American adult women report using prescription medicines for non-medical reasons, overwhelmed with balancing life, families and careers. But popping too many pills can lead to addiction, unsafe interactions with other medications, cardiac arrest and even death. Clean now for six years, Laurie is practicing civil law, attending weekly support meetings and rebuilding her life. (MSNBC, 2.24.10) Read more about prescription drugs.

Giving HPV the Boot
Cowboy boots emblazoned with glittery cowbells and bright red flowers – not what you would expect your doctor to be wearing when going in for a Pap smear. But Cynthia Varga, a family nurse practitioner in El Paso, is passionate about her work and wants to encourage women to take their health seriously. She says Hispanic women are often hesitant to visit clinics because of fear of finding out they have an illness or being discovered abouttheir undocumented status. The Pap smear detects HPV, which is transmitted through sexual contact and can cause cervical cancer if not treated. Since early stages of cervical cancer don't have symptoms, it's important for women to get tested every year, or as instructed by their doctor. (El Paso Times, 3.1.10) Read more about HPV and cervical cancer.