

BabyTalk

Baby Basics Moms Club of Virginia Partners with Martha Jefferson to Provide Support from the Start

Jingfang Niu and her husband, Sen, did not plan on starting a family while living in the U.S. The couple came from China to spend two years in Charlottesville, while Sen completed his stint as a visiting research scholar at UVa's Center for Applied Biomechanics.



So when Niu found out she was pregnant last winter, she was very surprised and a little nervous, with her family and friends so far away. She was concerned about staying healthy and taking good care of her unborn baby.

"I felt nervous when I learned that I was pregnant," said Niu, who delivered her baby in September. "I wanted to learn about pregnancy and how to take care myself and my baby."

Niu joined the Baby Basics Moms Club at Martha Jefferson Starr Hill Health Center, a statewide service that educates and supports pregnant women through partnerships with local organizations.

"Our community health needs assessment found that women in our area are not accessing prenatal care as they should," said Jackie Martin, director of community outreach at Martha Jefferson. "There also are huge disparities in outcomes for African-American women. The Baby Basics Moms Club addresses issues such as improving infant birth weight by teaching the signs of preterm labor, and instructing parents-to-be on how to put babies to sleep safely. We draw a diverse



group of moms from a variety of backgrounds, and these women really are learning from each other. We hope this program will help to improve pregnancy outcomes in our community.”

The Martha Jefferson group, which started up in February, meets twice weekly, with discussions led by childbirth educators and covering a wide range of topics from preterm labor, nutrition and breastfeeding to obesity, substance abuse and intimate partner violence. The program, which is not intended to replace prenatal care, is centered around “Baby Basics: Your Month-to-Month Guide to a Healthy Pregnancy,” published by The What to Expect Foundation in partnership with the March of Dimes.

The club also sponsors special activities such as a spa day with massages, manicures and pedicures for expectant moms. Free snacks and giveaways are provided at the meetings, which are free and open to all expectant mothers. Free babysitting is provided for children ages 3

Join the Baby Basics Moms Club!

When:

1st & 3rd Tuesdays, 5:30 p.m. – 7 p.m., or 2nd & 4th Tuesdays, 9:30 a.m. – 11 a.m.

Where:

Starr Hill Health Center at the Jefferson School City Center
233 4th Street, N.W.
2nd Floor, Room 255A

Cost:

FREE! No registration required.

For more information on childcare services or taxi rides, please call Health Connection at (434) 654-7009.



Free Health Assessments Offered at Starr Hill Health Center

Has it been years since your last physical? Are you worried about the state of your current health? Do you want to help your kids develop healthier habits? The Starr Hill Health Center is pleased to be able to offer FREE health assessments to people in downtown Charlottesville. You will receive a private, personal consultation with Miranda Trent, a certified nurse practitioner, and a plan specifically designed to improve your health as well as the health of your family, if that is a concern.

Morning, evening and weekend appointments are available. Take control of your health today and schedule an appointment!

To register, or for more information, call Health Connection at (434) 654-7009.



and over, and free cab rides are available to participants living within 10 miles of the Starr Hill Health Center.

Merry McKenna, executive director of Baby Basics Moms Club of Virginia who oversees the 12 club sites across the state, has seen positive results among women who participate in the program. For example, while the preterm birth rate in general across Virginia is 11.2 percent, the rate is much lower — just 4.3 percent — among moms who have completed the core topics in the Baby Basics program.

“That’s pretty significant,” McKenna said. “While we can’t pinpoint this one program as the reason behind these results, it’s very indicative that changes are being made and that our approach to education has an impact.”

McKenna has seen many women make positive changes to their lives while participating in the program, including establishing better eating habits and quitting smoking. She notes that 63 percent of moms who participated in the program are breastfeeding.

A popular learning activity for the club is a grocery shopping tour, often planned around the holidays. Each participant receives a gift card, provided through a grant from the March of Dimes, to shop while a dietitian guides them on how to make healthy food choices and read food labels.

“Studies show that pregnancy is the most teachable time in a woman’s life,” McKenna noted. “These moms are hungry for knowledge. They all want to be good moms, so we have a great opportunity to change behaviors.”

Niu has attended prenatal classes, but she also enjoys the Baby Basics Moms Club because it provides her with opportunities to ask questions and learn from other pregnant women.

“If I have a problem or feel confused about something, I can tell the other moms, and we all talk about it,” said Niu. “Many of them have experienced the same things, and I feel relieved because I know that it’s not just my problem — it’s universal. I felt

very nervous about my pregnancy at first, but the other moms and the nurse have given me support, encouragement and knowledge about my pregnancy and about how to take care of my baby. After completing several classes, I feel more relieved, and now I can enjoy my pregnancy. I feel happy about my pregnancy.”

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