

Prevention: A Cost Effective Equation for Families Today
By Caren Fairweather, MPS

New York State's Health Commissioner Richard Daines launched the "Prevention Agenda for the Healthiest State" just over a year ago. Whether you are pregnant, thinking about becoming pregnant, or have just had a baby, summer is the perfect time to adopt the advice that prevention is the best medicine. In these challenging economic times prevention will put money in your pocket now and protect your family's health for the long term.

According to the American Lung Association, "asthma is the leading serious chronic illness of children in the U.S." and "the third leading cause of hospitalization among children under the age of 15." While half of asthma cases are caused by allergies, exposure to second hand smoke is considered a major risk factor. Asthma and lung cancer are nearly as prevalent in people who live with smokers as with smokers themselves. One effective way to improve indoor air quality is by quitting smoking. At nearly \$7.00 a pack you can save more than \$2500 a year when you quit.

Other irritants in your home can worsen asthma. House paint, household cleaners, new carpeting, and vinyl curtains may contain VOCs, volatile organic compounds. Purchase products that say low VOC or no VOCs. Substitute low cost items like baking soda, white vinegar, salt, and liquid soap for household cleaning tasks. Conservatively, you can save another \$300 a year. Reinvest a small portion of these savings to buy essential oils that will make your home made cleaning supplies smell fantastic. Open your windows regularly to bring fresh air in. Cost: Zero.

Childhood obesity is now considered a major health threat. With more than 1 in 3 children in New York State being obese, many more children are diagnosed with type 2 diabetes, and heart disease including high blood pressure. Summer's bounty of fresh fruits and vegetables provide high nutritional value and fiber without fat, high sodium or refined carbohydrates. Increase adult servings to nine a day and introduce your cooked fresh fruits and vegetables to your children as soon as they are ready to eat solid foods. Start with soft foods that can be mashed like bananas, and steamed apples, carrots, green peas, and potatoes. Organic produce grown without pesticides is best. If organic produce is unavailable or seems too expensive, be sure to wash your produce thoroughly before eating it. Freeze mashed baby-size portions in an ice cube tray to thaw and use when summer produce is not available. Home-made baby food costs about 50% less than jars of store-bought baby food.

Of course, one of the best ways to give your baby a great nutritional start in life is by feeding him or her breast milk exclusively for the first six months to a year. Cost: Zero compared to around \$2000 a year for pre-mixed formula! A high quality pump to express your milk may cost around \$300, saving another \$1700 a year.

While the financial rewards of a healthy lifestyle are significant, the rewards of enjoying good health now, and raising healthy children is priceless.

Caren Fairweather, MPS is Executive *Director of Maternal-Infant Services Network (MISN) of Orange, Sullivan and Ulster Counties, a not-for-profit organization that*

coordinates health and human services for pregnant women and children. Visit our website at www.misn-ny.org or call 1-800-453-4666 for more information.