

## Implications of Prenatal Testing

Do women fully understand the implications of prenatal testing? Are they aware the one purpose of prenatal testing is to allow them the option of terminating the pregnancy if abnormalities are suspected? If you would not, under any circumstances, have an abortion, then prenatal testing is not for you. Why subject yourself and your unborn baby to numerous procedures, which are accompanied by risk factors, if you will carry your pregnancy to term, without question?

One study (1) to determine women's perceptions of prenatal screening, specifically AFP and ultrasound, revealed that almost all women had mostly superficial knowledge; they knew that it was offered and that it was done to screen for Down syndrome. Women were not knowledgeable about the sensitivity of screening procedures and the risks of diagnostic testing.

The personal reason mentioned most frequently was the "reassurance" the testing would provide. Yet, neither AFP screening nor ultrasound can offer a woman a 100% guarantee that their babies will be healthy. In this same study, 95% of the women surveyed connected AFP screening with Down syndrome, and one-fifth *wrongly* assumed that this screening of maternal blood could detect *all* cases of this disorder. Some women *wrongly* believed that AFP testing could detect *any* disease or abnormality.

When prenatal testing is offered, health care providers should accept some responsibility in educating pregnant women about the risks and benefits of specific tests. When counseling mothers-to-be about prenatal testing, there should be a greater emphasis on the sensitivity (or lack thereof) of AFP serum screening and the possible outcomes of the results, which could include more invasive procedures such as an amniocentesis and/or chorionic villus sampling.

The fact that an ultrasound may detect conditions that may, ultimately, lead to a decision on whether to terminate the pregnancy should be explained.

Please take into consideration the risks associated with any procedure performed on you or your baby. Ultimately, you must ask yourself what you would do differently if your baby was found to have an abnormality. Would you continue the pregnancy under any circumstances? If the answer is “yes” then these invasive diagnostic procedures would not be necessary. Your baby would have a zero percent risk of miscarriage caused by invasive testing and an extremely low chance of having abnormalities, and you will still have peace of mind.