

Planning for Pregnancy



If you are trying to have a baby or are just thinking about it, it is not too early to start getting ready for pregnancy. Preconception health and health care focus on things you can do before and between pregnancies to increase the chances of having a healthy baby. For some women, getting their body ready for pregnancy takes a few months. For other women, it might take longer. Whether this is your first, second, or sixth baby, the following are important steps to help you get ready for the healthiest pregnancy possible.

1. Make a Plan and Take Action

Whether or not you've written them down, you've probably thought about your goals for having or not having children, and how to achieve those goals. For example, when you didn't want to have a baby, you used effective birth control methods to achieve your goals. Now that you're thinking about getting pregnant, it's really important to take steps to achieve your goal—getting pregnant and having a healthy baby!

2. See Your Doctor

Preventive health care can help you stay healthier throughout your life.

Before getting pregnant, talk to your doctor about preconception health care. Your doctor will want to discuss your health history and any medical conditions you currently have that could affect a pregnancy. He or she also will discuss any previous pregnancy problems, medicines that you currently are taking, vaccinations that you might need, and steps you can take before pregnancy to prevent certain birth defects.

If your doctor has not talked with you about this type of care—ask about it!

Be sure to talk to your doctor about:

Medical Conditions

If you currently have any medical conditions, be sure they are under control and being treated. Some of these conditions include: sexually transmitted diseases (STDs); diabetes, thyroid disease, phenylketonuria (PKU), seizure disorders, high blood pressure, arthritis, eating disorders and chronic diseases.

Lifestyle and Behaviors

Talk with your doctor or another health professional if you smoke, drink alcohol, or use “street” drugs; live in a stressful or abusive environment, or work with or live around toxic substances. Health care professionals can help you with counseling, treatment, and other support services.

Medications

Taking certain medicines during pregnancy can cause serious birth defects. These include some prescription and over-the-counter medications and dietary or herbal supplements. If you are planning a pregnancy, you should discuss the need for any medication with your doctor before becoming pregnant and make sure you are taking only those medications that are necessary

Vaccinations (shots)

Some vaccinations are recommended before you become pregnant, during pregnancy, or right after delivery. Having the right vaccinations at the right time can help keep you healthy and help keep your baby from getting very sick or having lifelong health problems.

3. Take 400 Micrograms of Folic Acid Every Day

Folic acid is a B vitamin. If a woman has enough folic acid in her body at least 1 month *before* and *during* pregnancy, it can help prevent major birth defects of the baby's brain and spine.

4. Stop Drinking Alcohol, Smoking, and Using Street Drugs

Smoking, drinking alcohol, and using street drugs can cause many problems during pregnancy for a woman and her baby, such as premature birth, birth defects, and infant death.

If you are trying to get pregnant and cannot stop drinking, smoking, or using drugs—get help! Contact your doctor or local treatment center.

Smoking Resources

1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669)

5. Avoid Toxic Substances and Environmental Contaminants

Avoid toxic substances and other environmental contaminants harmful materials at work or at home, such as synthetic chemicals, metals, fertilizer, bug spray, and cat or rodent feces. These substances can hurt the reproductive systems of men and women. They can make it more difficult to get pregnant. Exposure to even small amounts during pregnancy, infancy, childhood, or puberty can lead to diseases. Learn how to protect yourself and your loved ones from toxic substances at work and at home.

6. Reach and Maintain a Healthy Weight

People who are overweight or obese have a higher risk for many serious conditions, including complications during pregnancy, heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and certain cancers (endometrial, breast, and colon).¹ People who are underweight are also at risk for serious health problems.²

The key to achieving and maintaining a healthy weight isn't about short-term dietary changes. It's about a lifestyle that includes healthy eating and regular physical activity.

If you are underweight, overweight, or obese, talk with your doctor about ways to reach and maintain a healthy weight before you get pregnant.

7. Get Help for Violence

Violence can lead to injury and death among women at any stage of life, including during pregnancy. The number of violent deaths experienced by women tells only part of the story. Many more survive violence and are left with lifelong physical and emotional scars.

If someone is violent toward you or you are violent toward your loved ones—get help. Violence destroys relationships and families.

8. Learn Your Family History

Collecting your family's health history can be important for your child's health. You might not realize that your sister's heart defect or your cousin's sickle cell disease could affect your child, but sharing this family history information with your doctor can be important.

Based on your family history, your doctor might refer you for genetic counseling. Other reasons people go for genetic counseling include having had several miscarriages, infant deaths, or trouble getting pregnant (infertility), or a genetic condition or birth defect that occurred during a previous pregnancy.

9. Get Mentally Healthy

Mental health is how we think, feel, and act as we cope with life. To be at your best, you need to feel good about your life and value yourself. Everyone feels worried, anxious, sad, or stressed sometimes. However, if these feelings do not go away and they interfere with your daily life, get help. Talk with your doctor or another health professional about your feelings and treatment options.

10. Have a Healthy Pregnancy!

Once you are pregnant, be sure to keep up all of your new healthy habits and see your doctor regularly throughout pregnancy for prenatal care.

References

1. NIH, NHLBI Obesity Education Initiative. Clinical Guidelines on the Identification, Evaluation, and Treatment of Overweight and Obesity in Adults. Available online: http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/guidelines/obesity/ob_gdlns.pdf (PDF-1.25Mb)
2. Moos, Merry-K, et al. Healthier women, healthier reproductive outcomes: recommendations for the routine care of all women of reproductive age. AJOG Volume 199, Issue 6, Supplement B , Pages S280-S289, December 2008.