

Getting Ready for Pregnancy

There are many things to do in order to prepare for pregnancy and most of them are fun. But there are some practical issues about having a baby that shouldn't be forgotten. If you are thinking about having a baby, it is important to prepare yourself for pregnancy before you try to conceive.

Before you become pregnant, make an appointment with your healthcare provider for a physical exam and to talk about your pregnancy plans. Your baby has a better chance of being healthy if you are healthy too. Your provider will ask about your personal and family medical history, lifestyle, and past pregnancies. The answers to these questions and the exam will help identify any risks or problems you may have.

Some of the questions you and your provider will consider are:

- **Have you been using birth control pills or another type of hormonal birth control?** If you have, ask your healthcare provider when it is best to stop. Healthcare providers often recommend that you use a nonhormonal form of birth control 2 to 3 months before you start trying to get pregnant. This gives your body time to get back to its regular cycle. You can use condoms or a diaphragm for birth control during this time.
- **Are you up to date for shots?** Your provider will check to see if you need any vaccine shots, for example, for flu or MMR (rubella, measles, or mumps). If you are planning to become pregnant during the flu season, you should have a flu shot. You will need an MMR shot if you have not had these diseases or if you have never been vaccinated with the MMR shot. If you have an MMR shot, you should wait at least 1 month after the shot before you try to get pregnant.
- **Have you or your partner had any medical problems?** Your provider will ask about illnesses and other medical problems that you, your partner, or other family members have had. If you have had a sexually transmitted disease, your provider will want to know how it was treated.
- **Do you have any medical problems now?** Your provider can test you for infections, such as tuberculosis and sexually transmitted diseases, including human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). Tell your provider about any medical problems you have, such as high blood pressure or diabetes. Your healthcare provider may need to use different medicines or other treatments to control your medical condition during pregnancy. It is sometimes better to start or change treatments, if needed, before pregnancy. Getting proper treatment for these problems can help you and your baby be healthy during your pregnancy.
- **Are you the weight you want to be?** It is best to start a pregnancy at a healthy weight for your height. If you are underweight, you are more likely to have a small baby. Small babies have more problems during labor and right after birth. Being overweight is also a health hazard for you and your baby. You have a greater chance of having high blood pressure and diabetes if you are overweight when you are pregnant. If you want to gain or lose weight, it is best to do it before getting pregnant. Once you are pregnant, you should not try to lose weight because you may deprive your baby of needed nutrients.

- **Do you have a healthy diet?** A healthy diet allows you and your baby to start with the nutrients you both need. Discuss your diet with your provider to determine whether there are any changes you should make before you get pregnant. Before you get pregnant, take a vitamin supplement with 400 micrograms (0.4 milligrams) of folic acid daily. Ask your provider about prenatal vitamins and mineral supplements with iron.
- **Are you doing exercise you enjoy?** Starting or continuing a regular exercise program before you get pregnant helps prepare your body for pregnancy and labor. Most women who exercise before pregnancy can continue to do so during pregnancy. Discuss exercise with your provider to determine what is best for you.
- **Do you smoke? Drink alcohol? Use any drugs or medicine?** Tobacco, alcohol, and drugs such as marijuana, crack, cocaine, and heroin can be very dangerous for both you and the unborn baby. Smoking during pregnancy can slow your baby's growth. It can also cause the birth to occur too early. Drinking alcohol during pregnancy can harm your baby's brain. Illegal drugs can also hurt your baby. If you are planning to get pregnant and you use any of these substances, now is the time to quit. Don't be afraid to ask your healthcare provider to help you quit. He or she can offer support and medical advice. Also tell your provider about any medicines you are taking, including prescription, nonprescription, and herbal medicines.
- **Have children with birth defects or inherited diseases been born to members of your family or your partner's family?** If so, you and your partner can talk with a genetic counselor. A genetic counselor will ask about your family's medical history. You may have tests of your chromosomes and your partner's chromosomes. The counselor can give you a better idea if your baby might be at risk.
- **Are you exposed to any health hazards at home or at work?** Tell your provider about any chemicals, radiation, or other health risks at home or at work.
- **Is there violence or abuse in your home?** If there is, tell your healthcare provider who can help you find a safe situation. It is probably a bad idea to get pregnant in an effort to help fix a troubled relationship. Having a child can make things worse.

It is also important to plan ahead and think about the many aspects of your life that will change. Having a baby affects your budget, work situation, daily schedule, health, and relationships with family and friends. Whether you have your own health insurance or are covered on someone else's policy, it's important to talk to either your employer or the human relations and benefits department to see if your health insurance plan covers pregnancy and pregnancy-related issues. Contact your health insurance plan and have them send you information regarding coverage during pregnancy.

During the time you are trying to get pregnant, try to relax and not let it become a stressful experience. Stress may make it harder for you to become pregnant. And remember that you will probably be pregnant for a while before you know you are pregnant, so it is important to maintain a healthy lifestyle. That way you

can find comfort in knowing that you are providing the healthiest environment possible for your baby no matter when he or she is conceived. Take care of yourself, and have a healthy baby!

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