

# Prenatal Care

## What is prenatal care?

Prenatal care is the care you receive when you are pregnant. It includes care given by your healthcare provider, support from your family, and an extra focus on giving yourself the care you need during this special time. Prenatal care improves your chances for a healthy pregnancy and healthy baby.

## When should I see my healthcare provider?

Good care during pregnancy includes regularly scheduled prenatal exams.

If you are not yet pregnant but planning to get pregnant in the next few months, see your healthcare provider. Your provider may do some tests and talk about things you can do to have a healthy pregnancy and healthy baby.

You should schedule your first prenatal visit with your healthcare provider as soon as you think or know you are pregnant. Depending on your health and health history, your provider will probably schedule visits at least once a month for the first 6 months. During the 7th and 8th months you will see your provider every 2 weeks. During the last month you will probably see your provider once a week until you deliver your baby. If your pregnancy is high risk, your provider will probably want to see you more often. In some cases your provider may refer you to a medical specialist for more help with special needs, such as diabetes.

At each visit your healthcare provider will check to make sure that you and the baby are healthy. Regular visits can help you and your provider prevent possible problems. They can also help your provider find and treat any problems early. In addition to meeting your medical needs, your provider will advise you about caring for yourself. You will talk about how to have a healthy diet and get plenty of exercise and rest. Your provider can also help you deal with the emotional changes that can happen during pregnancy.

## What will happen at the first prenatal visit?

At your first visit, your healthcare provider will ask about your personal medical history. He or she will also ask about the baby's father and your family health history. This information can help give your provider an idea of any problems you might have during your pregnancy. You will have a physical exam, including checks of your height, weight, and blood pressure and a pelvic exam. You will have a Pap test, urine tests, blood tests, and cultures of the cervix and vagina to check for infection. Your provider will make sure that your shots are up to date.

Your healthcare provider will calculate your due date and the age of your baby. If your periods were regular before you got pregnant, and you are sure of the day when your last period started, your due date will be estimated to be 40 weeks from that day.

Your healthcare provider will talk to you about how to stay healthy during your pregnancy.

## **What will happen at other prenatal visits?**

Your healthcare provider will check how you are doing and how the baby is developing. He or she will discuss how you are feeling, ask if you have any problems, and answer your questions.

During each prenatal visit your healthcare provider will:

- Weigh you
- Take your blood pressure
- Check your urine for sugar, protein, or bacteria
- Check your face, hands, ankles, and feet for swelling
- Listen to the baby's heartbeat
- Measure the size of the uterus to check the baby's growth

At different times during the pregnancy, other exams and tests may be done. Some are routine and others are done only when a problem is suspected or you have a risk factor for a problem. Examples of other tests you might have are:

- Tests to check for genetic problems and some birth defects, such as:
  - Chorionic villus sampling of cells from the placenta
  - Amniocentesis to test the fluid around the baby
  - Blood tests called triple or quad screens
- Ultrasound scans to check the baby's growth, development, and health and to look at your uterus, the amniotic sac, and the placenta
- Blood tests to check for diabetes
- Electronic monitoring to check the health of the baby

## **How can I take care of myself during my pregnancy?**

Here are some things you can do to take good care of yourself during your pregnancy and prepare for the birth of your child:

- Keep all appointments with your healthcare provider. Use these visits to discuss your pregnancy concerns or problems. Write down questions before each visit so that you will not forget about things you want to talk about.
- Eat healthy meals that include whole grains, fresh fruits and vegetables, and calcium-rich foods, such as milk, cheese, and yogurt. Choose foods low in saturated fat. Do not eat uncooked or undercooked meats or fish.
- Avoid certain fish with high levels of mercury. These fish include shark, king mackerel, swordfish, and tilefish. Do not eat more than 12 ounces of fish per week, or no more than 6 ounces of tuna fish per week. Because albacore tuna fish is also high in mercury, choose light tuna.
- Drink plenty of water each day.
- Take vitamins, other supplements, and medicines as recommended by your provider.
- Unless your healthcare provider tells you not to, try to be physically active for at least 30 minutes a day, most days of the week. If you are pressed for time,

you might find it easier to exercise 10 minutes at a time, 3 times a day. Consider taking a prenatal exercise class.

- Do not smoke, do not drink alcohol, and do not take illegal drugs.
- Talk to your healthcare provider before you take any medicine, including nonprescription and herbal medicines. Some medicines are not safe during pregnancy.
- Avoid hot tubs or saunas.
- If you have cats in your home, do not empty the cat litter while you are pregnant. It may contain a parasite that causes an infection called toxoplasmosis, which can cause birth defects. Also, use gloves when you work in garden areas used by cats.
- Stay away from toxic chemicals like insecticides, solvents (such as some cleaners or paint thinners), lead, and mercury. Check labels on household products. Most dangerous products have pregnancy warnings on their labels. Ask your healthcare provider about products if you are unsure.
- Relax by taking breaks from work or chores.
- Help reduce stress by sharing your feelings with others.
- Report any violence or other types of abuse in your home.
- Learn more about pregnancy, labor, and delivery. Read books, watch videos, go to a childbirth class, and talk with experienced moms.
- Plan for the lifestyle changes a new baby will bring. Prepare for possible changes in your budget, work situation, daily schedule, and relationships with family and friends.
- Talk to your provider about the pros and cons of breast-feeding.

Before and during your pregnancy, try to do everything you can to keep yourself and your baby healthy during your pregnancy.

Developed by RelayHealth.

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