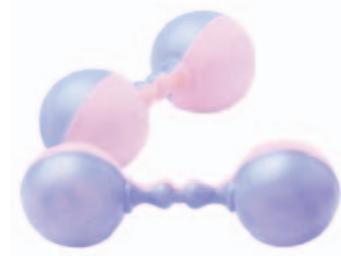


Preparing for Parenthood

You've decided to be a parent



Congratulations! You're beginning one of life's most wonderful journeys. And, like any traveler beginning a new adventure, you're probably feeling both excited and a little bit nervous. This chapter can be a helpful guide.

If you are not pregnant yet, there are still things you can do in your life to help give your future baby a healthy start. If you're already pregnant, you can begin making changes today to ensure that your baby will enter the world as healthy as possible. It is never too late to get started.

Thinking about starting a family? Take three baby steps right now!

Do you dream of having a happy, healthy child someday? Here are the three most important things you can do right now:

- Step 1:** Discuss with your partner whether you are both ready to have a baby
- Step 2:** Take care of yourself as if you were already pregnant
- Step 3:** Get a checkup



Step 1: Discuss with your partner whether you are both ready to have a baby.

Continue to use birth control until you are both ready—physically, emotionally and financially. Starting a family is a big decision. Sit down with your partner and ask yourselves:

- How will having a baby change our lives, our jobs and our relationship?
- How will we pay for prenatal care and delivery?
- Who will take care of the baby?
- Do we have enough money to pay for childcare, diapers, clothes and other baby things?

Step 2: Start taking care of yourself as if you were already pregnant.

Moms who are healthy when they get pregnant give their babies the best chance for a healthy start. You can be pregnant already and not even know it. That's why it's so important to get into healthy habits before you get pregnant.

FOLIC ACID IS REALLY IMPORTANT: By taking a B vitamin called folic acid before you're pregnant and in the early weeks of pregnancy, you lower your risk of some serious birth defects. Even if you're not planning to have a baby, if you're in a relationship that could result in a pregnancy you should take a daily vitamin with folic acid and eat foods like fortified breakfast cereals (check the label), leafy green vegetables, beans, orange juice, and nuts.

Step 3: Get a checkup.

Tell your health care provider at the beginning of your visit that you want to have a baby. Your health care provider will:

- Check on your overall health and help you with any special concerns you may have—including diet and exercise
- Make sure you have all the immunizations (shots) needed to protect your baby from illnesses that cause birth defects
- Discuss any health problems in your family that might affect your baby
- Ask you what medications you are taking
- Test for illnesses like high blood pressure and diabetes that could affect your pregnancy
- Test for AIDS (if you want) and other sexually transmitted diseases that could hurt your baby if left untreated
- Ask you about stress, depression, and abuse

You're pregnant!

Making Sure

If you think you are pregnant, you can take a home pregnancy test. These are available in drugstores and some supermarkets and they can tell you quickly and accurately whether or not you are pregnant.



You may have many or none of the following signs of pregnancy:

- You miss one or more periods
- You need to urinate frequently
- Your breasts are more tender and swollen than usual
- You find that certain tastes and smells make you feel sick
- You crave odd foods
- You feel nauseated or you vomit
- You feel very tired
- You feel very emotional or tearful
- You become constipated
- You have increased vaginal discharge

Get prenatal care

Prenatal care is the medical care that you get for yourself and your baby while you are pregnant. You can get prenatal care from a doctor or nurse-midwife. All women—and their babies—need prenatal care.

Why do you need prenatal care?

Prenatal care is important even if you feel just fine and are taking good care of yourself. Prenatal care can catch any problems before they become dangerous to you or your baby.

Ask your friends who've been pregnant before about prenatal care. At least one of them will probably tell you about a problem that was caught at a prenatal care appointment. If she didn't have any problems, she will probably tell you that it is

very reassuring to find out that you and your baby are doing just fine.

When do you need it?

Most pregnancies last a little more than nine months (40 weeks from the first day of your last period). For most of your pregnancy you should probably visit your health care provider once a month. Then, beginning in your seventh month (28th week), you should go every two weeks. During the final month (beginning in your 36th week), you will probably go once a week until your baby is born. If you have special problems, you may have to see your health care provider more often.

What happens at a prenatal care visit?

During your first prenatal care visit, your provider will ask you a lot of questions and do some tests. Most of your other visits will be much shorter.

At the **first** visit your health care provider will:

- Ask you about your health, your partner's health and the health of your close family members. Don't worry if you don't know all the answers
- Do a physical exam and a pelvic (internal) exam
- Weigh you
- Check your blood pressure
- Ask for a urine sample
- Do some blood tests to check for anemia and see if you have had certain infections. You will be asked if you want a test for HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.



- Do a pap smear to check for cervical cancer and other tests for vaginal infections
- Figure out your due date—an estimate of the day your baby will be born. Most babies are born within two weeks (before or after) of their due date



During **later** prenatal visits your provider will:

- Weigh you
- Check your blood pressure
- Ask for a urine sample to check for protein and sugar
- Measure your belly to see how the baby is growing
- Check your hands, feet and face for swelling
- Listen for the baby's heartbeat (after the 12th week of pregnancy)
- Feel your abdomen to gauge the baby's position (later in pregnancy)
- Do any tests that are needed, such as blood tests or ultrasound (see the next section)
- Ask you if you have any questions or concerns. It's a good idea to write down your questions and bring a list with you so you don't forget

Remember, the things you tell your health care provider are confidential. That means that he or she can't tell anyone else what you say. So don't be afraid to talk about issues that might be uncomfortable or embarrassing.

It's okay to tell your provider if you smoke, drink alcohol or take any drugs, or if your partner hurts or scares you. Your provider

needs to know all about you and your lifestyle so that he or she can give you and your baby the best care.

Prenatal tests

Your health care provider may offer you some prenatal tests during your pregnancy. They help to check on the health and growth of the baby, or help make sure you are staying healthy. These are the most common:

- ✓ **Ultrasound**—This test uses sound waves to make sure the baby is growing properly and check the position of the baby.
- ✓ **Triple Screen or AFP**—This blood test checks for genetic problems (like Down syndrome) and certain birth defects.
- ✓ **Amniocentesis**—In this test, a doctor uses a long needle to remove a small amount of amniotic fluid (the fluid that surrounds the baby) to check for genetic problems and certain birth defects.
- ✓ **Glucose screening**—This blood test checks for gestational diabetes (diabetes that develops during pregnancy).
- ✓ **Group B strep screening**—This test checks whether you need antibiotics for a type of infection that can harm your baby.

Women who have complicated pregnancies may need other tests as well. Your health care provider will explain these tests to you if you need them. Remember, you have the right to ask lots of questions so that you understand exactly why you might need the test and what the risks are, if any, to you and your baby.

Take care of yourself—and your baby

Nutrition and Weight Gain

There is no perfect diet for a pregnant woman. The best diet during pregnancy, as in the rest of your life, is one that includes lots of different foods that contain carbohydrates, protein, vitamins and minerals and just a little fat and sugar.

Here are some guidelines:

Eat foods from the five major food groups. These include:

- Grains—6 to 11 servings/day. Whole-grain breads and cereals, rice, and pasta are best.
- Vegetables—3 to 5 servings/day
- Fruits—2 to 4 servings/day. Try to eat at least one serving of a fruit rich in vitamin C like oranges, grapefruit, strawberries or cantaloupe
- Milk and Milk Products—3 to 4 servings/day. If you can't digest milk, try lactose-free dairy products, or calcium-fortified orange juice
- Protein foods—3 to 4 servings/day. This group includes meat, fish and beans



Limit fats. Less than one-third of your calories every day should come from fats like oil, salad dressing, butter, mayo, etc. It's better to give your baby calories that are packed with vitamins and minerals.

Drink up! You should drink a total of 6 to 8 glasses of water every day, as well as plenty of fruit juices and

milk. Try to stay away from soda and coffee. If you drink beverages with caffeine (coffee, colas), limit yourself to one or two per day.

Take your vitamin. If your health care provider gives you a prenatal vitamin, try to remember to take it every day. But don't take any vitamins or supplements without telling your health care provider.

SOME FOODS CAN MAKE YOU AND YOUR BABY SICK

They could cause food poisoning or contain chemicals that could harm your baby. So stay away from these foods while you are pregnant:

CERTAIN KINDS OF FISH:

- Swordfish, shark, king mackerel, and tilefish. Also avoid eating any game fish (caught in local waters) without first checking its safety with your local health department.
- Raw fish, especially shellfish (oysters, clams)



UNDERCOOKED FOOD:

- Undercooked meat, chicken, seafood and hot dogs. Cook all foods thoroughly to kill bacteria.
- Soft-scrambled eggs and all foods made with raw or lightly-cooked eggs

CERTAIN DAIRY PRODUCTS:

- Soft cheeses such as Brie, Feta, Camembert and Roquefort
- Unpasteurized milk and foods made from it

OTHER FOODS TO AVOID:

- Unpasteurized juices
- Raw sprouts, especially alfalfa sprouts
- Herbal supplements and teas

Stay away from herbal supplements. Some herbs can hurt your baby or cause preterm labor. Stay away from all herbal supplements and teas unless you've gotten your provider's okay.

Snack if you want to. Some pregnant women would rather eat smaller meals and frequent snacks. That's okay too. Don't let yourself get too hungry.

Weighing In

Weight gain is healthy and normal when you are pregnant. Most women are advised to gain about 25 to 35 pounds while they are pregnant. Overweight women are sometimes advised to gain less—15 to 25 pounds, and underweight women are advised to gain more—28 to 40 pounds. Your health care provider will tell you what is best for you, and will track your weight gain at each prenatal care appointment.

Never try to lose weight while you are pregnant. It could hurt your baby. Babies whose mothers don't gain enough weight may be born at a low birthweight—less than 5.5 pounds. These babies are at increased risk of health problems when they are born.

Exercise

If you aren't exercising already, talk to your health care provider about adding some activity to your day. You can take a walk, go for a swim, or look for a prenatal exercise class. Try to get a friend or a partner to join you. You should aim to exercise 3 to 4 times every week.

There's an extra bonus to exercising while you're pregnant—exercise can help relieve some of the discomforts of pregnancy such as constipation and backache. It can also relieve stress and

help you sleep better. And some studies suggest that women who are fit might have an easier time during labor and delivery.

The Facts About Alcohol, Cigarettes and Drugs

You've probably heard it before: alcohol, cigarettes and drugs are bad for you and for your baby. Being pregnant is the best reason you'll ever have to quit.

You might be thinking that you know of someone who drank or smoked during their pregnancy and their baby turned out just fine. Perhaps your own mother did some of those things. Well, scientists have studied these issues again, and their findings are clear: alcohol, cigarettes and drugs can harm your baby. Here's the latest research:

Alcohol. If you drink, your baby drinks, too. And since your baby is so much smaller than you are, just a little bit of alcohol can have a big effect on his or her growing body. Women who drink during their pregnancy can have a baby with a group of birth defects called fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS). FAS is the leading preventable cause of mental retardation. No one knows exactly how much alcohol a woman has to drink to cause harm, so it's best not to drink any alcohol while you are pregnant. If you need help quitting, ask your health care provider to refer you to a program for pregnant women.

Cigarettes. When you smoke, your baby smokes, too. Smoking takes oxygen away from your baby. This can cause a variety of problems including low birthweight and an increased risk of miscarriage and preterm labor. Smoking can also raise the odds that your baby will have learning and behavior problems later in childhood, and asthma or other

breathing problems. He or she is also at increased risk of SIDS—sudden infant death syndrome. This illness causes a baby who seems healthy to die without warning.

Secondhand smoke can also affect you and your baby. Try to stay away from people who are smoking while you are pregnant.

Quitting is not easy. But it is something you can do now for both you and your baby. Ask your health care provider for help. He or she can refer you to a program that is right for you.

Drugs. You know what drugs do to you. They do even worse things to an unborn baby. If you do any drugs – coke, crack, heroin, ecstasy, pain pills, pot, etc. -- while you are pregnant:

- You could miscarry, or your baby could be born dead (stillbirth)
- Your baby could be born addicted and have to go through withdrawal

Prescription medicines

Certain prescription drugs, including Accutane (for acne) and thalidomide (for cancer), can cause birth defects. Some over-the-counter drugs (like aspirin and certain cough medicines) are not recommended either. Make sure your health care provider knows about any medicines you are taking, but don't stop taking any prescription drug without your provider's okay.

- Your baby could be born too early and too small
- Your baby could have a stroke before it is born
- Your baby could have learning or behavior problems later in life

So, if you use drugs, please get help and stop. Do it for your baby.

Are you in a safe relationship?

If you get hurt, your baby gets hurt, too. No one deserves to be hurt or yelled at. Don't keep abuse a secret. If you are in a relationship where you are in danger of being harmed, call a hotline or ask your health care provider or another person you trust to help you get out. Don't think that it will get better during your pregnancy. It won't. Abuse often begins or gets worse during pregnancy. And there are people who are waiting to help you.

Your due date is near

Know the warning signs of preterm labor.

Preterm labor and birth occur before the 37th week of pregnancy. (Remember, most pregnancies last about 40 weeks.) Babies that are born too early often have problems breathing and keeping warm. Sometimes they have lifelong disabilities or learning problems. Babies born too early are more likely to die than babies born at the right time.



You may be having preterm labor if you have:

- Contractions every 10 minutes, or more often
- Clear, pink or brownish fluid (water) leaking from your vagina
- The feeling that your baby is pushing down
- A low, dull backache
- Cramps that feel like your period
- Cramps with or without diarrhea

Call your health care provider immediately if you think you are having preterm labor. If you can't reach your provider, go to the hospital.

Your provider may tell you to:

- Come into the office or go to the hospital for a checkup
- Stop what you are doing and lie down on your left side for one hour
- Drink 2 to 3 glasses of water or juice. Don't drink coffee or soda
- If the symptoms get worse or do not go away after one hour, call your health care provider again or go to the hospital
- If the symptoms get better, relax for the rest of the day



Get ready for birth and your new baby! As you reach the end of your pregnancy, you will naturally begin to think about two things: birth, and how you will take care of your baby. Here are some ways to prepare for both:



Take childbirth classes. Your health care provider, hospital or health plan may offer these for free or low cost. You can also get information by taking a parenting class, reading books and magazines, finding videos and TV shows about parenting, checking out the internet, or talking to other parents.

Learn about breastfeeding. There is no doubt that breast milk is the best food for a newborn baby. It is nutritionally complete, the perfect temperature, and it contains antibodies and nutrients that protect your baby from illness and help his or her brain develop.

Find a pediatrician for your baby. If you don't know a pediatrician, ask your health care provider or other parents for suggestions. Make an appointment to talk to the pediatrician before your baby is born to be sure you are comfortable with your choice and to talk over any concerns.

Get your home ready for your baby. Lots of baby books and magazines can help you plan. Make sure you buy furniture and supplies that meet safety standards.