

Preparing for pregnancy

Making healthy choices before you become pregnant can have a positive impact on both you and your baby. Your health and family history, diet and nutrition, and use of alcohol, tobacco and drugs can have an impact on your pregnancy. These factors can be especially important in the beginning, before you even know you are pregnant. We will be glad to schedule a preconception counseling visit to discuss your personal health and history so that you can have the safest and healthiest pregnancy possible.

Preconception care is especially important if you have a **medical condition** such as asthma, diabetes, high blood pressure, seizures and lung or heart problems. Please tell us about any **medications** you take regularly so they can be checked for safety during pregnancy. Also discuss any problems with your previous pregnancies or deliveries as you may need special care and testing.

It is ideal to have **immunizations** up to date. The flu shot is recommended for all pregnant women and those trying to conceive. Pregnant women are at higher risk for complications of the flu. If you are not sure if you had chickenpox, a blood sample can be drawn to check your immunity. Most children are immunized against measles, mumps and rubella (MMR). Sometimes immunity wears off and a MMR booster is needed. This can also be checked by a blood sample. These two vaccines are not safe to receive during pregnancy. It is also not safe to get pregnant for one month after receiving these vaccines.

A healthy and nutritious diet is important while trying to get pregnant. If you are overweight or underweight, it is best to get your weight in normal range before pregnancy. If you follow a special diet such as vegetarian, it is important to make sure you are getting adequate vitamins and minerals. **Folic Acid** is an important vitamin for women trying to get pregnant. A daily supplement of 400-800 mg should be taken. Adequate folic acid helps to prevent neural tube defects, which are defects of the spinal cord and skull.

Smoking, drinking and drug use during pregnancy can harm the baby. Now is the time to quit. If you need help, talk to your doctor or practitioner for treatment or referral.

Some conditions occur more often in certain families. Talk to your relatives about history of diabetes, high blood pressure, blood clots, mental retardation and seizures. Certain disorders can be inherited. These are called genetic disorders. Some genetic disorders are more common in certain ethnic groups. **Cystic Fibrosis** is a genetic disorder more common in Caucasians. A blood test can be done before pregnancy to test if you or your partner carries the gene that causes the disease. Knowing your risk can help you decide about having a baby or to plan for special care.

Depending on your age, family history, and ethnic group, you may be referred to a genetic counselor to help find out your chances of having a baby with a birth defect.

If you are currently using a birth control method, you should stop the method and use an alternative method such as condoms and spermicide until you have 2-3 normal periods. If you have normal cycles, ovulation usually occurs midcycle around day 14. The first day of your period is day 1. To get pregnant, have unprotected intercourse every other day starting at day 10 through day 18.

Parenting is a major commitment with many challenges and many rewards. Healthy choices before pregnancy are very important for a happy, healthy pregnancy.