

## **PREPARING FOR A HEALTHY PREGNANCY**

Everyone wants a healthy pregnancy and some simple steps will make that more likely. First and most important is to look at your lifestyle. Are you a smoker? It's best to quit **BEFORE** you decide to have a baby. Cigarette smoke has dangerous chemicals in it that can hurt your baby. If you quit, you will decrease the chances of your baby being born prematurely, decrease your chance of miscarriage, and stillbirth. Since it takes time to quit, you should try to quit before you try for a pregnancy. Invite others in your household to quit too, since babies who live with smokers are more likely to die of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). If you use street drugs to get high, quit now. Street drugs are harmful to your developing baby. Next, think of how often you drink alcohol, beer, wine, coolers or liquor. Alcohol causes birth defects of the face and brain. Stopping ahead of time will help your baby be healthy.

Next, look at your weight and what you eat. If your weight is normal for your height, your chance of a healthy pregnancy is best. If you are overweight, now is the time to get down to a healthier weight. Being overweight when you start a pregnancy increases your chances of getting complications like diabetes and high blood pressure which can be harmful to your baby. Eating healthy foods, foods low in fat and sugar and high in fiber will give the baby the building blocks it needs to develop normally. Vegetables are especially important. We recommend you eat 3-5 vegetables every day while pregnant. Protein foods are next most important. Chicken, cheese, yogurt, low fat meats as well as beans peas and nuts are good sources of protein. Low fat dairy products are a good source of calcium, important for strong bones. Iron helps build the baby's blood system. It is found in dark leafy green vegetables like collard greens, kale, spinach, romaine lettuce, and red meat like beef. It is important not to over eat, since excess weight gain is unhealthy for the baby and increases the chance of a cesarean birth.

**Exercise** Check with your midwife or doctor to see if it is OK for you to exercise. Most women can exercise during pregnancy, in fact it helps reduce the chance of the baby being born too early.

**Medical Problems** Be sure to tell your midwife or doctor about any medical problems you have now or in the past so they can be controlled.

**Prescription drugs and herbal supplements.** Tell you midwife or doctor about any medications or herbal supplements you are taking to make sure they are safe for your baby. It is wise to start taking prenatal vitamins (available over the counter at drug stores and other stores where vitamins are sold). The folic acid, found in these vitamins cuts in half the chance of your baby having a birth defect of the brain or spine.

**Appointments** Make sure you keep every appointment. They are scheduled at least once a month and more often later in pregnancy to make sure you and the baby are developing in a healthy way.

**Family History** You will be asked at the first appointment if you have any family inherited diseases such as cystic fibrosis, muscular dystrophy, hemophilia, Tay-Sachs, sickle cell anemia. Your practitioner may want to do early testing to see if these will be problems for you. Before you go for your first appointment, ask your relatives if they have any medical problems like these.

**Infections and immunizations** Ask your parents if you are up to date on your shots. If you are not sure you can call your family doctor or health department to find out. If you need any booster shots get them BEFORE becoming pregnant. Many diseases that can harm the baby can be prevented by being up to date on your shots.

Your midwife will test you for infections and treat any infections that can harm your baby at the first few visits.

**Dental** Did you know that some dental problems can harm your baby by making you more likely to deliver too early. Seeing your dentist and getting infections and dental problems corrected BEFORE pregnancy is best.

**Environmental** If you have a cat, ask someone else to change the cat litter or wear rubber gloves and wash your hands thoroughly. Some germs in cat poop can harm your baby. You don't have to get rid of your cat.

Remember, your body was designed to carry and birth a baby. If you treat your body as it was designed to be used, you are much more likely to have a safe and healthy pregnancy and birth.

**WARNING SIGNS:** Severe lower abdominal pain, bleeding like a period, persistent severe vomiting; see your care provider right away.

**Additional Resources:**

[www.marchofdimess.com](http://www.marchofdimess.com) [www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/preconception/default.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/preconception/default.htm) [www.myplate.gov](http://www.myplate.gov)