

# Preconception Care: Things to Do before You Become Pregnant

Planning a pregnancy with someone that you love can be exciting and rewarding. There are many things for you and your partner to consider before you become pregnant. Careful planning can increase the chance of having a healthy baby.

## Your Physical Health

You and your partner should visit your doctor before you become pregnant. Talk with your doctor about any medical conditions you or your partner may have. A history of your past pregnancies, including any problems, will be taken. Genetic counseling may be suggested. Tests for sexually transmitted infections and a Pap test may be done.

## Medicines

- **Bring a list of any medicines that you are taking.** Be sure to include any prescription, over the counter and herbal remedies you take.
  - ▶ Do not take any over the counter medicines unless your doctor approves it.
  - ▶ Some medicines may need to be changed **before** you become pregnant, such as **heart, diabetic, seizure or medicines for blood clots.** Talk with your doctor about changes for your medicines.

More on next page →

Learn more about your health care.



- **Some medicines should be stopped before you become pregnant. Check with your doctor about the medicines you take.**
  - ▶ Stop the medicine isotretinoin, sold as brand name Accutane.
  - ▶ Stop the use of ibuprofen, sold as the brand Advil or Motrin.
  - ▶ Stop the use of naproxen, sold by the brand Anaprox or Aleve.
  - ▶ Avoid high doses of vitamins and dietary supplements.
  - ▶ Avoid herbal remedies and other home remedies.
- **If you could get pregnant or are planning to get pregnant, take 400 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid or a prenatal vitamin every day.** This can help prevent some birth defects. Ask your pharmacist to help you find folic acid. Your doctor may recommend other vitamins and minerals before or during pregnancy.

## **Vaccines**

Update your vaccines before becoming pregnant, using these guidelines:

- A Tdap booster if you have not had one in 10 years.
- Rubella vaccine if you are not immune to German measles. Avoid becoming pregnant for one month after getting this vaccine.
- Varicella vaccine if you have not had a chicken pox infection. Avoid becoming pregnant for one month after getting this vaccine.
- Your doctor may recommend other vaccinations, such hepatitis B or flu to protect your health.

## **Dentist**

Make an appointment with your dentist to check, clean, and repair any problems with your teeth. Ask your dentist about proper care of your teeth and gums during pregnancy.

## **Nutrition and Healthy Eating**

You and your partner should eat a well balanced diet. Try to achieve a normal weight before you get pregnant. Your doctor, nurse, or dietitian can talk with you about proper eating.

### **Follow these tips to eat healthy before and during pregnancy:**

- Eat a diet high in a B vitamin called folate or folic acid. It is in **fortified** breads and cereals, **enriched** rice, and whole wheat foods. Beans, peas, asparagus, broccoli, leafy vegetables, bananas, orange juice and peanuts are also good sources for this vitamin.
- Drink plenty of water each day.
- Cut back on caffeine. Limit yourself to two cups, or 16 ounces total, of coffee, tea or soft drinks with caffeine each day. Drinking caffeine free beverages is best.
- Take a prenatal vitamin or folic acid supplement each day.
- Limit foods high in fat and sugar.
- Avoid alcohol, including beer, wine and liquor, when trying to get pregnant or when pregnant.

**Before and during pregnancy, limit foods with chemicals, mercury or germs that may be present and harmful to you or your baby.**

### **Eating Fish**

**Fish can be very healthy for your baby while you are pregnant. It is good for your baby's brain and eye development.** However, eating too much fish can cause mercury to build up in your body and be harmful to your unborn baby. Below are guidelines on some fish to avoid and amounts of fish to eat:

- **Do not** eat swordfish, tilefish, king mackerel, shark, raw fish or uncooked shellfish, such as clams, oysters and scallops.
- **Do not** eat refrigerated uncooked smoked fish, labeled as Nova-style, lox, kippered or jerky.
- **Limit** your eating of tuna steaks, canned albacore or chunk white tuna, halibut and snapper to **no more than 6 ounces** each week. To determine portion size, a deck of cards is 3 to 4 ounces, so about 1½ deck of cards of cooked fish is about 6 ounces.
- **Limit** your eating of the fish listed below to **no more than 12 ounces** each week. These fish are generally low in mercury and good choices:
  - ▶ shrimp
  - ▶ crab
  - ▶ clams
  - ▶ canned light tuna
  - ▶ salmon
  - ▶ Mahi Mahi

- ▶ oysters
  - ▶ scallops
  - ▶ cod
  - ▶ Pollack
  - ▶ catfish
- Check with your state health department before eating fish caught in local waters.

### **Other Nutrition Tips**

- Cook all meats, seafood and eggs thoroughly.
- Wash all fruits and vegetables well.
- Only use pasteurized milk and cheeses. Do not drink raw milk.
- Do not eat refrigerated pates or meat spreads.
- Do not eat hot dogs or luncheon meats unless they are cooked until steaming hot.
- Do not eat nonfood substances such as dirt, clay, starch or freezer ice. If you want to eat these foods tell your doctor or nurse. It may be a sign of a mineral deficiency.

### **Exercise and Fitness**

Get physically fit before you become pregnant. Exercise will help you maintain a normal weight and be strong for pregnancy.

- Do 30 minutes of exercise 3 to 4 days per week. Brisk walking is a good exercise. Talk to your doctor about other exercises you can do.
- Wear loose clothing.
- Drink plenty of water each day.
- Avoid overheating. Avoid hot tubs and tanning beds.

### **Harmful Substances**

You and your partner should **avoid** harmful substances:

- Tobacco, cigarette smoke and nicotine.
- Illegal drugs.
- Alcohol.

- Chemicals found in paints, paint thinners, paint strippers, strong cleaning products, and insect and weed killers.
- Radiation exposure (x-rays).
- Cat litter and sand boxes.
- Rodents such as pet mice, hamsters and guinea pigs.

## **Finances and Budget**

A baby will add to your expenses.

- Review your health insurance coverage for pregnancy, childbirth, well baby visits and sick baby care. Check about co-payments, deductibles, and out of pocket expenses so you can plan for these costs.
- Review your maternity and paternity leave policies at work.
- Review long-term disability and life insurance policies.
- If you have limited income, you may be able to get Medicaid and WIC, a nutrition and education program for pregnant mothers and babies.
- Make a will and update beneficiaries.
- Have a durable power of attorney for your medical care. Review your plans with your partner.
- Consider your desire and ability to work after you have a baby. Think about childcare expenses. Think about the loss of income if you stay home with the baby.
- Consider daily expenses with a baby such as diapers and clothing, and formula if you choose not to breastfeed.

## **Your Emotional Health**

Talk with your partner about your desire to have a baby. If you are not in a stable, committed relationship, are you ready to raise your baby alone? Who can help you? Who will help you if the baby is sick or has special needs?

Think about how a new baby fits into your life plan, such as your education and career. Consider the timing of your pregnancy in relation to the ages and needs of your other children.

Resolve any emotional problems, such as stress, anxiety, or depression before you become pregnant. You want to bring a baby into a safe home. No one should be threatening or hurting you.

When pregnant, talk with your partner about post partum depression. Read the document “**Your Emotions after Delivery**” to recognize the signs of depression.

### **For Your Partner**

Help the mother of your child to have a healthy life style by taking better care of your health. Work to create a safe and healthy home for mom and baby.

For more information about how partners can support the baby’s mother, read the document “**Facts for Fathers**” which gives tips about pregnancy care.

- **Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: [health-info@osu.edu](mailto:health-info@osu.edu).**