

Healthy
Living
Healthy
Baby

PREPARING FOR PREGNANCY



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So you want a Healthy Baby

Healthy living is important for people planning a pregnancy. Both partners' way of life may affect the health of the baby. Even by the time a woman's period is 2-3 weeks late the baby will be formed and the heart beating. It's a good idea to plan ahead.

Use this leaflet as a guide to help you plan for your baby.

Things to do before you get pregnant

- Contact your doctor, nurse, health visitor or family planning clinic
- Take a 400 microgram (mcg) folic acid tablet daily
- Stop smoking
- Avoid alcohol
- Avoid drugs
- Avoid environmental hazards
- Eat well and aim for a healthy weight
- Take regular exercise
- Remember to relax
- Visit your dentist.

See your Doctor

To make sure you are healthy before becoming pregnant have a check-up. You may need to have:

- A smear test
- Abnormal vaginal discharge treated
- A German Measles (Rubella) injection.

'You should also talk to your doctor about any previous pregnancies'

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You should also talk to your doctor about:

- Any previous pregnancies
- Family histories of abnormalities eg. Cystic Fibrosis, Spina Bifida
- Taking folic acid
- Medicines – during pregnancy the general rule is not to take any medicine without asking your doctor. This includes over the counter medicines and vitamin supplements
- Contraception – to give your body a chance to get ready for pregnancy, it is preferable to stop using the pill or the coil (IUD) one month before trying to get pregnant. It is important to note the date of the first day of your last normal period, to help estimate when the baby will be due.

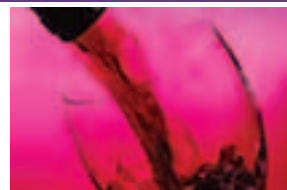
Take a folic acid tablet daily

All women trying to get pregnant are advised to eat folate rich foods (fruit and vegetables) and take a folic acid tablet (400mcg per day). Ideally this should be started three months before you wish to become pregnant, however it is beneficial to start as soon as you decide to try for a baby. This should be taken until the 12th week of pregnancy. If you, your partner or either of your families have a history of Neural Tube Defects (eg. Spina Bifida) or if you have coeliac disease or any other malabsorption state, diabetes, sickle cell anaemia or are taking antiepileptic medicines contact your doctor for more specific advice.

Stop smoking

It is harder for men and women who smoke to start a family. Smoking is very harmful to your baby and you. Now is a good time to give up smoking.

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Avoid alcohol

Alcohol can affect the normal development of the egg and sperm. You should avoid alcohol both before and during pregnancy. If you do decide to drink you should drink no more than 1 or 2 units once or twice a week and avoid getting drunk.

1 unit = ½ pint beer (average strength); 1 small glass of wine (125mls) = 1½ units.

Avoid drugs / harmful substances

Substances such as glue, ecstasy, cannabis, cocaine, heroin, LSD, etc. will be harmful to your baby. Stop them now. Ask your doctor for help.

Avoid environmental hazards

When a woman is trying to get pregnant she should

- Wear gloves when gardening
 - Avoid contact with cat litter trays
 - Avoid contact with sheep and lambs during lambing season.
- Some chemicals, x-rays and lead can affect your fertility and your baby's health. If you are worried about any of these talk to your doctor.

Eat well

Every day choose a variety of foods from each of the following foods groups. Try to eat 3 regular meals and avoid snacking.

Meat, fish, eggs, beans and other non dairy sources of protein

Choose two foods from this group every day. Avoid shark, swordfish and marlin which are high in methylmercury and which may affect an unborn baby's nervous system. Tuna should be limited to 2 fresh steaks or 4 medium tins per week (140g drained weight / tin).

'Some foods, which may not be helpful to you, may affect your baby'

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Fruit and vegetables

Choose 5 helpings from this group daily. Include green leafy vegetables often.

Bread, rice, potatoes, pasta and other starchy foods

Try to include a breakfast cereal with added vitamins and minerals daily. Base your meals around these foods.

Milk and dairy foods

These are a good source of calcium. Include 600mls (1 pint) milk daily or equivalent eg. 200mls (1/3 pint) milk = 30g (1oz) cheese = 1 x 150g pot yoghurt. See food safety advice for more information about cheeses to avoid.

Weight

Being very overweight or very underweight can affect your chances of getting pregnant. It's sensible to try to reach a healthy weight for your height. If you are overweight it is not a good idea to go on a 'strict diet'. Your body may not get all the nutrients you require to help your baby grow. Try instead to avoid sugary and fatty foods and follow the 'Eat well' advice above.

Food safety

Some foods, which may not be harmful to you, may affect your baby.

Avoid

- Raw or lightly cooked eggs or foods that contain them eg. unpasteurised mayonnaise, hollandaise or Béarnaise sauce, desserts made with raw eggs such as tiramisu, mousse, homemade ice cream

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- Mould ripened cheese eg. Brie, Camembert
- Blue cheese eg. Stilton, Danish Blue
- Unpasteurised milk and cheese or yoghurt made from it
- Liver or foods made from liver eg. pâté
- Cod liver oil
- Raw shellfish
- Ready prepared salads eg. coleslaw, pre-washed salad leaves.
- Since August 2009 Government advice about eating peanuts during pregnancy has changed. It is not clear from the latest science if eating peanuts during pregnancy (or not eating them) affects the chances of your baby developing a peanut allergy. The current advice is that if you wish, you can choose to eat peanuts or foods containing them, unless you are allergic to them yourself.

Some other important food safety points are:

- Wash all fruit and vegetables well
- Keep all raw and cooked foods separate and covered
- Store cooked foods above raw foods in the fridge
- Wash hands and utensils well before handling foods or eating
- Keep fridge temperature between 0-5C
- Reheat ready to eat foods, chicken and turkey until piping hot
- Cook all foods well
- Cool cooked foods quickly if not going to be eaten immediately and then refrigerate
- Eat foods before the 'use by' or 'best before' date.

Remember to relax

Make time to relax each day. This is important as stress can reduce your chances of becoming pregnant.

“Take regular exercise”

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Take regular exercise

This is a good time to be active. Continue or take up some exercise. If you have not been exercising, start slowly and build up to about 30 minutes most days. Ideal exercises include walking, swimming and cycling. If you are not sure if an exercise is suitable when you are pregnant - check with your doctor or midwife. Being fit can make pregnancy and labour easier!

See your dentist

It's wise to have a dental check up before getting pregnant. During pregnancy all women are prone to gum disease, so get advice early.

Infertility

If you have been trying to get pregnant for a year without success talk to your doctor who may refer you to a specialist.

After you have your baby

Breast milk is the best food for babies, ask your midwife for more information and advice.

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