



Plan for a healthy pregnancy

To help a pregnancy get off to a good start, take these steps before you get pregnant:

- Get a medical checkup. Discuss your medical history and your family medical history with your doctor. Include past pregnancy problems.
- Do you have a chronic medical problem, such as asthma, diabetes or high blood pressure? If you do, ask your doctor if changes need to be made in your treatment plan.
- Find out what medicines you can take. Ask which ones you should not take. Tell or show your doctor all prescribed and over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, herbal products, etc. that you take. Ask if you need to change any of these while you try to get pregnant.
- Take a prenatal vitamin supplement before pregnancy and continue taking it throughout your pregnancy. This should include iron and folic acid. Taking 400-800 micrograms of folic acid every day can help prevent serious birth defects of the brain and spine. Make sure you take folic acid for at least one month before you get pregnant. Women who have had a baby with a serious problem of the brain or spine should take the amount of folic acid their doctor's advice.
- Discuss current and past birth control methods. Ask what method you should use until you decide to get pregnant.



- If you or your partner has a family history of sickle-cell disease, cystic fibrosis, Tay-Sachs disease, etc., get genetic counseling. Do this, too, if you are older than age 35 or if your partner is age 60 or older.
- Do you smoke? Do you take street drugs? If so, now is the time to quit. Get help if you need it.
- Secondhand smoke can expose the fetus to toxic chemicals so no one that you live with should smoke around you.
- Stop drinking alcohol.
- Get vaccines and health screenings, as advised by your doctor.
- Avoid exposure to X-rays.
- Get regular exercise.
- If you are overweight, lose weight before you get pregnant.
- Eat a healthy diet that includes plenty of fruits and vegetables, whole grains, beans and lentils, nuts and seeds, lean animal proteins (e.g., chicken) and low-fat dairy foods and other calcium-rich foods.
- Caffeine is okay for women planning to get pregnant, but limit it to 400 milligrams a day. This is the amount in about two 8-ounce cups of coffee. Follow your doctor's advice for caffeine during pregnancy.
- Stay away from chemicals and cat or rodent feces.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
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