

Healthy Pregnancy & Birth

Tips for a Healthy Pregnancy

Following the recommendations below can help you have a healthy pregnancy.

- Be sure to have regular prenatal care, starting as early as possible. Your healthcare provider can assess you and your growing baby every step of the way to help ensure a healthy pregnancy and delivery. It may be a good idea to consult your healthcare provider if you are thinking of becoming pregnant, he or she can provide you with the guidance you need.
- If you are pregnant or thinking of becoming pregnant you should start taking a folic acid supplement. During pregnancy it is recommended that women get 400 micrograms of folic acid a day. This reduces the risk of neural tube defects. Some breads, cereals and pasta are fortified with folic acid and folate can be found naturally in leafy greens and orange juice. Folate is not absorbed as well as folic acid and can be difficult to get from food alone. It is recommended that pregnant women take prenatal vitamins containing 400 micrograms of folic acid. In certain cases where a woman has had a previous child with neural tube defects a larger dose of folic acid may be recommended.
- Pregnant women should avoid alcohol and tobacco because these can increase the risk of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). FASD can result in intellectual and developmental disabilities, behavior problems, abnormal facial features, disorders of the heart, kidneys, bones, and hearing. Research shows that no amount of alcohol is safe to consume during pregnancy. SIDS is the sudden, unexplained death of an infant younger than 1 year of age. Drinking or smoking during pregnancy increases the risk of SIDS as does exposure to second hand smoke.
- When you are pregnant it is important to talk to your doctor about any medications you are taking including over the counter, prescription, and herbal supplements because some medications are not safe during pregnancy.
- Pregnant women need to be cautious about exposure to toxic substances. Toxins such as radiation, pesticides, certain metals and chemicals can cause birth defects, premature birth or miscarriage. Women who work on a farm, in a dry cleaner, factory, nail or hair salon need to take extra care not to come in contact with dangerous substances. Talk to your healthcare provider about your potential exposure to toxic chemicals. The following should be avoided:

Lead – Found in house paint, dust, garden soil, and some well water.

Radiation – Found in air, dust, powders, and liquids. Make sure your dentist and doctor are aware that you are pregnant so that precautions can be taken with x-rays and other treatments that involve radiation.

Solvents – Found in alcohol, degreaser, and paint thinner may give off fumes or be absorbed through skin and can be harmful to the fetus.

Healthy Pregnancy & Birth

- It is very important during pregnancy to eat a healthy diet consisting of a variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low fat dairy and plenty of water.
- While pregnant be sure you are consuming foods that are safe for you and your baby. You should avoid raw fish, undercooked meat, deli meat, and unpasteurized cheese. Pregnant women need to limit their consumption of foods that contain methylmercury. It is safe to consume up to 12oz a week of fish or shellfish that are low in methylmercury such as salmon, canned light tuna, or shrimp. Albacore or white tuna is safe to consumer in smaller amounts 6oz or less. It is recommended that pregnant women avoid swordfish, king mackerel and shark.
- Pregnant women need to be aware of their caffeine intake, too much caffeine may increase the risk of a miscarriage. Caffeine be found in coffee, tea, soda, and some foods such as chocolate. Most pregnant women are advised to consume less than 200 milligrams a day that is the equivalent of a 12oz of coffee.
- Being physically active contributes to a healthy pregnancy. Most women can continue with their regular physical activity. Regular physical activity can help you feel better and sleep better. Being active also helps your body prepare for giving birth and may allow you to get back into shape quicker following delivery. Talk to your doctor about your current physical activity level and the amount that is safe during pregnancy.
- It is important to maintain a healthy weight even during pregnancy. Excessive weight gain can increase your risk for gestational high blood pressure, a cesarean section delivery, and a larger baby. The appropriate weight gain depends on your pre-pregnancy weight and Body Mass Index. If you are underweight (BMI <18.5) you should gain 28 to 40 lbs. If you are normal weight (BMI between 18.5 and 24.9) you should gain 25 to 35 lbs. If you are overweight (BMI between 25 to 29.9) you should gain 15 to 25 lbs. If you are obese (BMI > 30) you should gain between 11 and 20 lbs.
- Additional vitamin supplements may be necessary for some pregnant women. Your doctor may recommend that you take iron supplements to reduce your risk of anemia. Vitamin B12 may be recommended for women who are vegan or vegetarian.

Regular dental check ups are an important part of a healthy pregnancy. Hormonal changes and increased blood flow can cause gums to be inflamed of infected.

Healthy Pregnancy & Birth

Vitamins and minerals during pregnancy

Vitamins and minerals help your body function correctly. Pregnant women need more folic acid and iron than non-pregnant women. Taking a prenatal vitamin along with eating a well –rounded diet should provide you with all of the vitamins and minerals you need.

Folic acid: Taking folic acid during pregnancy and for 1 month before becoming pregnant may help prevent birth defects of the brain and spine called neural tube defects. It may be difficult to get the correct amount of folic acid through diet alone so it is recommended that pregnant women take a daily vitamin supplement containing at least 400 micrograms of folic acid.

Iron: Your body uses iron to make a substance in red blood cells that carries oxygen to your organs and tissues. Women require twice as much iron during pregnancy to make more blood to supply oxygen to the baby. Pregnant women should take 27 milligrams of iron a day. This is the amount found in most prenatal vitamins. Iron is found naturally in some foods such as lean red meat, poultry, fish, dried beans and peas, iron-fortified cereals and prune juice. Eating iron-rich foods along with foods rich in vitamin C such as citrus fruits and tomatoes may allow iron to be absorbed easier.

Calcium: Calcium is important in the development of your baby’s bones and teeth. All women age 19 years and older should get 1000 milligrams of calcium a day and younger women, age 14 to 18 years of age should get 1300 milligrams a day. Dairy products such as milk, cheese and yogurt are the best sources of calcium, other sources include broccoli, dark leafy greens or sardines. Your doctor may also recommend a calcium supplement.

Vitamin D: Vitamin D plays a role in calcium absorption it is also important for healthy skin and eyesight. All women, including pregnant women need 600 international units of vitamin D daily. Fatty fish such as salmon and milk fortified with vitamin D can help you get your recommended daily dose. Exposure to sunlight can also provide you with vitamin D.

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Vaccines During Pregnancy

Vaccines can help keep you and your growing family healthy. If you are pregnant or planning a pregnancy, the specific vaccinations you need are determined by factors such as your age, lifestyle, medical conditions, type and locations of travel, and previous vaccinations. If possible, make sure that your immunizations are up to date before becoming pregnant. Since a mother's immunity is passed along to her baby during pregnancy, this will also protect the baby from some diseases during the first few months of life until the baby can get vaccinated.

Vaccines that are safe and recommended for women who are pregnant or planning to become pregnant include:

- Flu vaccine- It is safe, and very important, for a pregnant woman to receive the inactivated flu vaccine. A pregnant woman who gets the flu is at risk for serious complications and hospitalization.
- Tdap vaccine- Women should get adult tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis vaccine (Tdap) during each pregnancy. Ideally, the vaccine should be given between 27 and 36 weeks of pregnancy

After you give birth, your doctor may also recommend vaccinations for tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis, measles, mumps, rubella, chicken pox and/or seasonal influenza if you have not already been vaccinated.

For a detailed chart of vaccines for women who are pregnant or planning to become pregnant, please visit: http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pubs/downloads/f_preg_chart.pdf

Healthy Pregnancy & Birth

Premature Birth/ Preterm Labor

Did you know 1 of every 9 babies born in the U.S. is premature? Birth that is at least three weeks before a baby's due date is considered premature. It is also known as preterm birth (or less than 37 weeks—full term is 40 weeks). Important growth and development occur throughout pregnancy, especially in the final months and weeks.

The good news is there are things that women can do to improve their health, lower the risk of having a premature baby, and help their baby be healthy.

- Avoid risky substances. If you smoke, quit. Smoking can trigger preterm labor. Alcohol and drugs are off-limits, too. In addition, medications of any type, even those available over-the-counter, deserve caution. Get your health care provider's approval before taking any medications or supplements.
- See your health care provider for a medical checkup before pregnancy. Get prenatal care as soon as you think you may be pregnant, and throughout your pregnancy.
- Talk to your health care provider about how to best control diseases such as high blood pressure or diabetes during your pregnancy.
- Gain weight wisely. Work with your health care provider to determine the right amount of weight gain to support your baby's health.
- Eat a healthy diet rich in folic acid, iron and calcium, and take prenatal vitamins. It is important to take prenatal vitamins daily before and during pregnancy to fill in any nutritional gaps.
- Limit certain physical activities. If you're at risk of preterm labor or develop signs or symptoms of preterm labor, your health care provider might suggest avoiding heavy lifting or spending too much time on your feet.
- Know the warning signs or symptoms of preterm labor. It's important to seek care if you think you might be having preterm labor, because your doctor may be able to help you and your baby. <http://www.marchofdimes.org/pregnancy/signs-and-symptoms-of-preterm-labor-and-what-to-do.aspx>

If your health care provider determines that you're at increased risk of preterm labor, he or she might recommend taking additional steps to reduce your risk.