

Tips for a Healthier, Easier Pregnancy



Healthy moms tend to have healthy babies. If you plan to become pregnant, take the following steps to help your baby get off to a good start.

- Have a complete medical exam, including a gynecological exam. A number of medical conditions, including obesity, high blood pressure, diabetes, smoking, alcohol use, nutritional deficiencies, and Rh negative blood factor (after the first pregnancy) can jeopardize the health of mother and child.
- Check with your doctor about the effects of any prescription or over-the-counter medication you take.
- If you have a chronic medical condition, ask your doctor how it may affect your pregnancy and whether or not you should change or adjust your medication.
- If you use an IUD or take birth control pills, use an alternative form of birth control for 1 to 2 months before trying to become pregnant.
- If you're markedly overweight, plan to lose excess pounds before becoming pregnant.
- Exercise regularly.
- Consider genetic tests or counseling if you or your husband has a family history of genetic disorders, if you are 35 or older, or if your husband is 50 or older.

You and your baby will do best if you follow these guidelines.

- Ask your doctor or a dietitian to outline a meal plan that meets the special nutritional needs created by pregnancy.
- Avoid caffeine, alcohol, nicotine, and illicit drugs, as they can harm you and your unborn baby.
- Consult your doctor before taking any medication.
- Ask your doctor what prenatal vitamin/mineral supplement you should take.
- Follow your health care provider's advice about weight gain. The amount of weight you gain should depend on your pre-pregnancy weight and health status, as well as your ethnic background. If you are very overweight, plan to lose excess pounds before you get pregnant.
- Continue to exercise in moderation.
- Practice relaxation and other stress management techniques. (Doctors think emotional stress may constrict the blood supply to the uterus and placenta, the baby's only source of oxygen and nutrients.)
- Enroll in childbirth preparation classes.
- If you own a cat, arrange for someone else to empty the litter box. Cat excrement can transmit a disease called toxoplasmosis. If you're infected while pregnant, your baby may be stillborn, born prematurely, or suffer serious damage to the brain, eyes, or other parts of the body.