

# 15 TIPS TO PREPARE FOR PREGNANCY

You can increase your chances of a safe pregnancy and a healthy newborn by taking these 15 precautions.

## 1 Reach a healthy weight before conceiving.

Obese women are more prone to gestational diabetes and preeclampsia (dangerously high blood pressure), and women with those conditions tend to have complicated deliveries.

## 2 Exercise before and during pregnancy.

If you're fit, your heart can more easily meet the demands of pregnancy and pump a steady flow of blood to the fetus. Strong muscles can support pregnancy weight and reduce the risk of injuries.

## 3 Schedule a gynecological exam.

Your doctors will look for potential problems which can be treated or controlled before you conceive.

## 4 Take prenatal vitamins for at least two months before conception (and throughout the first trimester).

The most critical time for nutrition is during the first eight weeks of gestation — when many women aren't aware of their pregnancies. The folic acid in prenatal vitamins may decrease the risk of fetal brain and nervous-system abnormalities, while the extra iron can prevent anemia.

## 5 Get a blood test.

If your blood is Rh negative and your baby is Rh positive, your body will produce antibodies that destroy Rh positive red blood cells. In first pregnancies, the antibodies are too few in number to cause alarm. But in later pregnancies, Rh antibodies can cause fetal anemia, organ damage or death. If you're Rh negative, an injection of Rh immune globulin in your first pregnancy will prevent future production of Rh antibodies.

## 6 Test for rubella antibodies.

If you haven't developed antibodies against rubella, get vaccinated. In that case, wait at least three months before conceiving. Rubella can cause birth defects.

## 7 Consider genetic counseling.

If you're concerned about a family history of stillbirths or mental disabilities, consider genetic counseling. Likewise, if you have a family history of inherited diseases such as cystic fibrosis, or if you and your spouse have similar ethnic origins, you may want to find out if you're carriers of specific genetic diseases.

## 8 If you use oral contraceptives, switch to another

form of birth control for at least a month before conceiving. Although fetal problems are rarely associated with birth control pills, some hormones are known to cause fetal damage.

## 9 Review your medications with your

doctor. Accutane, antiseizure medications, chemotherapy and other medications can harm your growing fetus. Over-the-counter medications can also be unsafe.

## 10 Revamp your diet.

Eat at least five servings

a day of fruits and vegetables

to provide folic acid, beta-

carotene, vitamin C and

other nutrients. Eat

lean beef and fortified

cereals to boost your

iron reserves, and

include four nonfat

dairy servings daily.

## 11 If you smoke,

quit. Smoking increases the risk of fetal-growth retardation, miscarriages, prematurity and stillbirth.

## 12 Give up alcohol.

It can cause brain dysfunction and facial and skeletal malformations.

## 13 Don't do drugs.

They can cause fetal abnormalities, prematurity and growth retardation.

## 14 Take care of X-rays and dental work before

you conceive. Modern dental X-ray techniques offer adequate protection from harmful radiation, and local anesthetics are not believed to be dangerous during pregnancy. But why take a chance?

## 15 Avoid overheating.

Exercising at too high an intensity or taking hot baths, saunas and whirlpools can raise your core body temperature. That, in turn, may cause congenital defects.

