

Planning Is The Key

The best start for your future baby begins right now, before you are pregnant. There are many things you and your partner can do to give your baby the best possible start.

Did you know...

- All of your baby's important organs form very early.
- Birth defects may happen before a woman has missed a period and knows she is pregnant.
- You can lower the risk of birth defects and pregnancy problems by making good health choices before and during your pregnancy.

TIME

CHOOSING WHEN YOU GET PREGNANT IS IMPORTANT.

- **Family planning.**
Planning your future is important. Family planning lets you decide if you want a child, when that will happen, and helps you have a healthy baby. If you are having sex, it's important to use a method of birth control until you are ready to have a baby. And don't forget about birth control after you have your baby. For your own health and the health of your baby it is best to space your pregnancies about two years apart.
- **Age.**
Women under 18 and over 34 who have babies are more likely to have problems with pregnancy or have babies which are born too small or too soon to be healthy.
- **Before you stop birth control.**
Get a physical examination and counseling. Go in for this visit at least three months before you want to become pregnant. Ask about taking vitamins and folic acid.

HABITS

HABITS CAN AFFECT YOUR PREGNANCY.

- **Eating.**
Eat healthy food and regular meals. It's important for you and your baby. Dieting may be harmful. Use less caffeine.
- **Folic acid and vitamins.**
All females, ages 10 to 50, should get 400 mcg of the vitamin folic acid each day from a healthy diet and a vitamin pill. This can reduce the risk of certain serious birth defects to the brain and spine.
- **Exercise.**
Regular exercise will help you feel better and get your body ready for pregnancy.
- **Smoking.**
Smoking or being around smokers can cause your baby to be born too small or too soon to be healthy. Smoking marijuana can cause problems too.
- **Drugs and medicines.**
Using illegal drugs or even some medicines that are prescribed or bought over-the-counter, can cause miscarriage, brain damage, addiction, or even death to your baby,
- **Alcohol.**
Drinking alcohol, such as beer, wine, "coolers", and hard liquor, can cause birth defects, mental retardation and even death to your baby.

HEALTH

BEFORE YOU GET PREGNANT TALK TO YOUR DOCTOR OR NURSE ABOUT:

- **Medical conditions.**
Medical problems need to be treated before pregnancy. This includes such conditions as diabetes, epilepsy, high blood pressure, heart or kidney disease, infections, hepatitis or anemia.
- **Immunizations.**
Make sure your immunizations are up to date. They can prevent some diseases like measles (rubella) which cause birth defects.
- **Family health.**
Does anyone in your family have an inherited disease, birth defect or mental retardation? Some diseases and birth problems can run in families. Genetic studies could help avoid inherited problems.
- **STDs.**
You or your partner may have a sexually transmitted disease (STD) that you don't know about. All STDs, such as herpes, chlamydia, syphilis and HIV/AIDS, can cause serious problems.

- **Emotional health.**

Get help if you have violence or abuse in your life, high levels of stress or not enough support. Pregnancy can cause money problems and interfere with school or work.

AFTER YOU'VE DONE THE PLANNING...

Getting pregnant

An average woman can become pregnant during a short period of time about two weeks before her next period is due. Women with irregular periods can get pregnant at very different times in their menstrual cycles. Talk to your doctor or health care provider about when you are most likely to get pregnant.

Get a pregnancy test if you think you are pregnant or if you miss your period. Usual early signs of pregnancy include sore or enlarged breasts, urinating more often, nausea and tiredness.

Prenatal care.

It is important to get care as early as possible and then regularly throughout your pregnancy.

Hazards.

Working with certain metals and chemicals, such as lead, paint, oven cleaners, bug killers, gasoline and car exhaust can cause pregnancy problems and may harm your baby. Other hazards include eating raw meat, handling used cat litter or being around animals or people with certain diseases.

BEFORE YOU GET PREGNANT...

There are many things you need to think about What will you need to know and do to plan for your pregnancy and parenthood? You may find helpful information from:

- Family planning services
- Prepregnancy books at your local library, bookstore or clinic
- Exercise classes
- Stop smoking programs
- Food and nutrition programs
- Counseling and mental health centers
- Religious leaders
- School counselors and nurses
- Alcohol/Drug treatment programs
- Medical insurance plans
- Social services

- Local health department
- Doctors, nurses, clinics, hospitals or other health care providers

For more information: 1-800-322-2588
Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies Hotline