



# MDwise

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## Preparing for a Healthy Pregnancy

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### Topic Overview

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Even though you're not pregnant yet, you might already be thinking about which room to turn into the baby's room and how to decorate it. And you might be making lists of all the baby clothes and supplies that you'll need. But it's also a good time to take some steps to help yourself have a happy pregnancy and a healthy baby.

Now more than ever, it's smart to get regular exercise, eat healthy foods, and drink plenty of water, as well as to reduce or stop drinking caffeine. Avoid alcohol, tobacco, and illegal drugs. When possible, avoid using medicines, including over-the-counter medicines. Always talk to your doctor first before you stop or start any medicines.

If you are not sure when you are most likely to get pregnant (when you are fertile), use the Interactive Tool: [When Are You Most Fertile?](#)

If you haven't yet chosen a health professional for pregnancy, childbirth, and after-birth (postpartum) care, give some thought to your many options. For more information, see [Choosing Your Health Professional for Pregnancy Care](#).

### Talk to your doctor about your medicines

Before trying to conceive, talk to your doctor about any medicines or dietary supplements you are taking. You and your doctor may decide that it's best to stop taking the medicine, to take a different medicine, or to keep taking it.

### Eat well

- **Choose healthy foods instead of junk food.** Eat a balanced diet. Pregnancy is not the time to lose weight. If you want to lose weight, do it before becoming pregnant. Don't go on a crash diet, because you may end up with a nutritional deficiency that could be harmful to you or the baby.
- **Take a daily vitamin-mineral supplement.** Taking a supplement that contains 0.4 mg to 0.8 mg (400 mcg to 800 mcg) of folic acid **before** becoming pregnant reduces the chance of having a baby with a neural tube defect.

- If you have a family history of neural tube defects, have had a previous infant with a neural tube defect, or are on medicines to prevent seizures, take a daily supplement containing 4 mg (4000 mcg) of folic acid.
- You also need other vitamins and minerals, such as calcium, for your health and that of your baby.

For more information on how to eat well, see the topic [Healthy Eating](#).

## Make lifestyle changes

- **Quit smoking.** If you need help quitting, talk to your doctor about stop-smoking programs and medicines. These can increase your chances of quitting for good.
- **Cut down on caffeinated drinks**, such as coffee, tea, and cola drinks.
- **Stop drinking alcoholic beverages.** Alcohol can severely harm a developing fetus.
- **Stop any use of illegal drugs**, such as cocaine or marijuana. Cocaine may cause serious problems in pregnancy, including placenta abruptio, fetal distress, and preterm labor.
- **Get plenty of exercise.** Exercise is good for healthy pregnant women. Try to do at least 2½ hours a week of moderate exercise.<sup>1, 2</sup> One way to do this is to be active 30 minutes a day, at least 5 days a week. It's fine to be active in blocks of 10 minutes or more throughout your day and week. For more information, see the topic [Fitness: Getting and Staying Active](#).

## Get a checkup

If any problems or needs are found, deal with them early. Make sure you are fully immunized to prevent potential fetal harm. For example, if you have never had German measles (rubella) or the rubella vaccination or are unsure, tell your doctor. If a blood test shows that you have no immunity, you can be vaccinated. You should then wait at least 3 months after being vaccinated before you try to get pregnant.

As a part of your physical checkup, you may want to ask for a **prepregnancy exam**. Such an exam can help you find out risks to you or your potential children from pregnancy. This knowledge may help you decide whether you wish to see a family medicine doctor or midwife for your care during pregnancy or whether you require the care of a specialist. It may also help you decide what tests you want to have done during pregnancy.

If you have a condition such as diabetes or high blood pressure, be sure to talk with your doctor about what this means for your pregnancy. Find out what you need to do to manage your condition and be ready for pregnancy.

## Consider genetic testing

Talk to your doctor about whether to have screening tests for diseases that are passed down through families (genetic disorders). Screenings for genetic disorders include those for:

- Cystic fibrosis.
- Sickle cell disease.
- Tay-Sachs disease.

## Stopping birth control

If you use an intrauterine device (IUD), arrange to have it removed. If you have been taking the Pill (oral contraception) or using birth control shots (such as Depo-Provera), try to wait until you've had your first full menstrual period before you try to conceive. After your last birth control shot, it may take as long as 1 year for

your period to come back.

## Keep track of your menstrual periods

Understanding how pregnancy occurs and using fertility awareness can help increase your chances of becoming pregnant.

Keep track of your menstrual cycle and when you have sexual intercourse. This information will help in figuring out your due date and your fetus's gestational age after you become pregnant.

## Credits

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Note: The "printer friendly" document will not contain all the information available in the online document. Some information (e.g. cross-references to other topics, definitions or medical illustrations) is only available in the online version.

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