

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 at least 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 for this visit at least three months before you want to become pregnant. Ask about taking vitamins and make sure you are taking folic acid.

HABITS

HABITS CAN AFFECT YOUR PREGNANCY

Eating

Eat healthy food and have 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 folic acid each day from a healthy diet and a vitamin pill. Folic acid is a B-vitamin. This vitamin 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. Smoking marijuana can hurt your baby, too.

Drugs and medicines

Using illegal drugs (like marijuana and others) or even some medicines (prescribed or over-the-counter), can cause miscarriage, brain damage, addiction, or even death to your baby. Check with your doctor about medicines that are okay during pregnancy. Illegal drugs are NEVER okay.

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 YOUR HEALTH

Medical conditions

Medical problems need to be treated before pregnancy. This includes conditions like diabetes, epilepsy, high blood pressure, heart or kidney disease, infections, hepatitis or anemia.

Immunizations

Make sure your immunizations (shots) are up-to-date. Shots can prevent some diseases like measles (rubella), which cause birth defects.

Family health

Does anyone in your family have mental retardation, or an inherited disease or birth defect? Some diseases and birth defects 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 have serious effects on you and your baby.

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.

PLAN

Getting pregnant

The average woman can become pregnant during the short period of time before each period (about two weeks). 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 through your pregnancy.

Health 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 pregnancy and parenthood?

You can get information from:

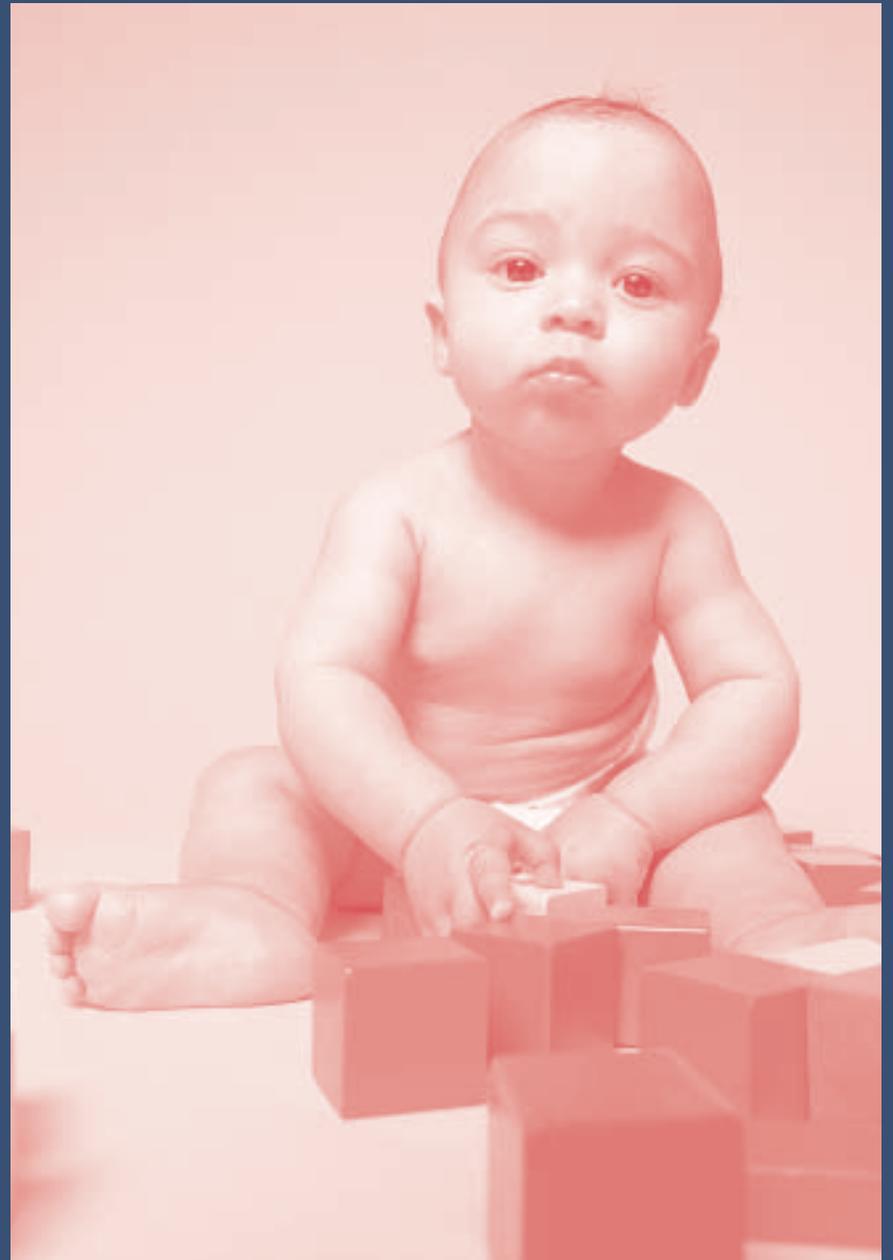
- Family planning services
- Pre-pregnancy books at your local library, bookstore, or clinic
- Exercise classes
- Stop smoking programs
- Food and nutrition programs
- Counseling and mental health centers
- Religious leaders
- School counselors and nurses
- Alcohol/drug treatment programs
- Medical insurance plans
- Social Services
- Local health departments
- Doctors, nurses, clinics, hospitals or other health care providers

For more information, call the Care Line at 1-800-868-0404.



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BEFORE YOU GET PREGNANT



PLANNING IS THE KEY