



Preparing for Pregnancy

The decision to have a baby is very exciting. For many women, this decision also comes with many questions. What can be done to prepare for pregnancy? What can be done to ensure a healthy pregnancy? How long will it take to get pregnant?

The preconception period, the time before pregnancy, is the ideal time to optimize healthy habits and lifestyle choices. It is also the time to modify bad habits, such as smoking and/or drug and excessive alcohol use that could negatively affect a pregnancy. “Maintaining a healthy lifestyle with a well-balanced, nutritious diet and regular exercise is important at all times in a woman’s life, but is particularly important when trying to conceive and throughout the pregnancy period,” explains Kathryn Simons, M.D., OB/GYN Division Chair and practicing physician with Washington Health System.

“Although most nutrients should come from food, a multivitamin is an excellent supplement that will help to guarantee that women are meeting all of their daily vitamin requirements,” continues Dr. Simons.

One of the most important vitamins to take when preparing for pregnancy is folic acid. Daily folic acid (400 micrograms--the amount commonly found in a multivitamin) in the pre-pregnancy period and first three months of pregnancy helps prevent neural tube defects such as spina bifida.

If possible, achieving a normal body weight before becoming pregnant will also optimize pregnancy outcomes. A normal body weight before and during pregnancy helps overall fertility and minimizes complications of pregnancy. Women with excess weight are more likely to experience complications of pregnancy including elevated blood pressure, gestational diabetes, pre-eclampsia, pre-term birth and increased rate of cesarean delivery. Women who are underweight are more likely to have a low birth-weight baby or experience a preterm delivery.

The preconception period is also an important time for women to review their medical history, making sure all immunizations are up to date and that any medications being used are safe and approved to use during pregnancy.

“Women who have medical conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure, seizure disorders or depression have a higher risk of complications during pregnancy, so it is important for them to discuss these conditions with their physician so that the medical condition is well controlled before pregnancy,” says Dr. Simons.

Once a woman has optimized her health and lifestyle for pregnancy, the next question is often, “How long will it take to get pregnant?” A couple can start trying to conceive immediately after stopping birth control. Although fertility can be influenced by many factors, including age and overall health, most couples (85%) are able to conceive within one year. A couple who has not conceived after twelve months of regular, unprotected intercourse should meet with their physician to begin an evaluation for possible factors affecting fertility.

Preparing for pregnancy will help create a healthy environment for the mother-to-be and the baby.

Smiling new moms...



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