



Preparing for Pregnancy

By Adam Blickley, MD

Pregnancy is among a woman's most life-changing events, both physically and emotionally. As a parent prepares for a newborn, a woman's health before pregnancy should be addressed.

The overall health of a woman prior to pregnancy can influence the ease of pregnancy, the maternal risks, and the health of her child. Since only about half of all pregnancies are actually planned, staying fit and healthy even before can lead to a healthier and happier pregnancy.

- Begin by considering a preconception appointment with your doctor. Your doctor can perform a physical exam with a Pap and screening tests, obtain a health history, family history and review any changes that need to be made prior to your becoming pregnant.
- Lifestyle factors are important in achieving good health before pregnancy. Diet and nutrition, vitamins and eating habits need to be assessed and improved where appropriate. Maintain a healthy weight before pregnancy. Being overweight can influence risks such as diabetes, hypertension and birth trauma. Pregnancy is not the time to lose weight, and ideal weight gain ranges from 15 to 35 pounds, depending on starting weight.
- Vitamins are essential before as well as during pregnancy. A folic acid containing vitamins decreases the chance of a child being born with a spinal defect. Begin folic acids before pregnancy by taking a vitamin supplement with no less than 0.4 mg of folic acid. Many herbal supplements are not well studied and should be used in moderation. An excess of 10,000 IU of vitamin A has been shown to cause birth defects.

- Keeping fit both before and during pregnancy is important. Thirty minutes a day of moderate activity is recommended, including swimming, walking, jogging and noncontact sports. You can enjoy the same activities during pregnancy as long as no complications dictate otherwise.
- Smoking, alcohol and drug use can cause harm to an infant. If you use any of these substances, quit before pregnancy. Smoking leads to underweight babies and other problems; alcohol use can cause fetal alcohol syndrome.
- Medical problems that you may need to address prior to pregnancy include diabetes, hypertension, hypothyroidism, HIV/AIDS, PKU, bleeding or clotting disorders, seizure disorders and asthma.
- Genetic counseling may also be necessary depending on age, ethnic origin and family history. Hemoglobin disorders such as Sickle Cell and Thalassemia should be screened before conception. Cystic fibrosis is a common lung disease that can be screened for prior to pregnancy to see if a couple is at risk of having an affected child.
- Stay up to date with vaccinations including tetanus, pertussis, influenza, and chicken pox. Other considerations include the need for Rubella, Hepatitis and HPV vaccines.

Remember, only half of all pregnancies are planned, so it's important to prepare for pregnancy by maintaining good health at all times. Regular doctor visits with health screening, maintaining a healthy weight, and engaging in good habits of diet and exercise, and cessation of substance abuse are essential to good health in all seasons of life.

Dr. Adam Blickley is an OB/GYN with Grand Rapids Women's Health. He specializes in ultrasound imaging and minimally invasive surgery. To read the rest of his biography, visit www.grrapidswomenshealth.com



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**For more info: please contact the research team at:
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