

Having a Healthy Pregnancy

Pregnancy can be a thrilling and special part of your life. But it can also be a little scary. If this is your first baby, you might have questions about what to do and what not to do. What do I need to eat? Will I be tired all the time? Will I have stretch marks? These questions are normal. But try to enjoy this journey one step at a time! You can do simple things to keep both you and your baby happy and healthy.

One half of all pregnancies are not planned!

It's important for you to be as healthy as you can be, all the time. Many women don't know they are pregnant during the first few weeks of their pregnancy. Take action now to manage any of your current health problems. Then you can help reduce any health risks to you and your baby.

Before Pregnancy

If you are thinking about getting pregnant, or you are able to get pregnant, you have many ways to take care of your health.

- ◆ Are you planning a baby? Then plan a visit with your doctor! At this visit, you can discuss any health concerns you have. Ask for advice on all the steps listed here! Tell your doctor if you are being treated
- ◆ by other types of doctors, including for mental health issues.
- ◆ Ask your doctor about the new national preconception guidelines. You and your doctor can talk about how you can get, or stay healthy, before you get pregnant or early in your pregnancy. By understanding how your health and behavior before pregnancy can affect you and your baby's health DURING and AFTER pregnancy, you can help prevent future problems for you and your baby. You and your doctor should talk about healthy behaviors such as appropriate weight, nutrition, exercise, oral health, and avoiding alcohol, tobacco, and other toxic substances. Your doctor could also help you and your partner understand genetic risks, mental health issues (such as depression), and intimate partner domestic violence.
- ◆ Ask your partner to stay healthy too! Ask your partner to limit how much alcohol he consumes. If your partner uses illegal drugs or smokes, encourage him to quit. Studies show that men who drink a lot,



smoke, or use drugs can have problems with their sperm. Their health issues might cause you to have problems getting pregnant.

- ◆ Get 400 micrograms (or 0.4 mg) of folic acid daily from foods fortified with folic acid or by taking a vitamin or folic acid pill. Do this **BEFORE** you get pregnant and for at least the first three months of pregnancy. Folic acid (or folate) can help keep your baby from having birth defects. If you don't get enough folic acid, your baby's spine may not form right. This condition is called spina bifida [spy-nuh bif-uh-duh]. If you don't get enough folic acid, your baby's brain may not form or may only partly form. This condition is called anencephaly [an-en-seffelee].
- ◆ Many doctors will prescribe a vitamin for you that has folic acid. But you also can buy vitamins or folic acid pills at the drug



Why Is Taking Folic Acid So Important?

Before 1991 we didn't know that taking folic acid before getting pregnant and in the first three months of pregnancy helps prevent certain kinds of birth defects. Now we know that getting 400 micrograms (or 0.4 mg) of folic acid daily in a vitamin or in a folic acid pill is best for ALL women who might get pregnant. And it helps to eat a healthy diet that has lots of fruit and vegetables and foods that have folic acid added to them.

store or grocery store. Taking folic acid in a pill is the best way to know you are getting enough. You could get your folic acid though food alone, but it is hard to know if you're getting enough. A healthy diet is important for you and your baby. Some foods with folate are leafy green vegetables, kidney beans, orange juice and other citrus fruit, peanuts, broccoli, asparagus, peas, lentils, and whole-grain products. Folic acid is also added to some foods like enriched breads, pastas, rice, and cereals.

- ◆ Start watching what you eat. Eat fruit, vegetables, and whole grains, like whole-wheat breads or crackers. Eat plenty of calcium-rich foods, such as non-fat milk or yogurt, low-fat milk or yogurt, and broccoli, that you and your baby need for strong bones and teeth. If you live in areas where fruit and vegetables aren't in season, frozen vegetables are a good option. Avoid eating a lot of fatty foods, such as



butter and fatty meats, and salt. Choose leaner foods, such as chicken and turkey without the skin and fish.

- ◆ Tell your doctor if you smoke or use alcohol or drugs. Quitting is hard, but you can do it. Ask your doctor for help. It's one of the best things you can do for your baby.
- ◆ Get enough sleep. Try to get seven to nine hours every night.
- ◆ If you can, control the stress in your life. When it comes to work and family, figure out what you can really do. Set limits with yourself and others. Don't be afraid to say NO to requests for your time and energy.
- ◆ Move your body. It is best to start exercise programs before pregnancy. Start now. With your doctor's guidance, continue an exercise program when you are pregnant.
- ◆ Get any health problems under control. Talk to your doctor about how your health problems might affect you and your baby. If you have diabetes, monitor your blood glucose levels. If you have high blood pressure, monitor your blood pressure. If you are overweight, talk to your doctor about what a healthy weight is for you. You and your doctor can work together to help you have a safe pregnancy and a healthy baby.
- ◆ Ask your mother, aunts, grandmother, and sisters about their pregnancies. Did they have morning sickness? Problems with labor? How did they cope with them?
- ◆ Find out what health problems run in your family. Tell your doctor about these issues. You can get tested before getting pregnant for some health problems that run in families, which is called genetic testing.
- ◆ Make sure you have had all of your immunizations (shots), especially for rubella (German measles). If you haven't had chickenpox or rubella, get the shots at least three months before getting pregnant.
- ◆ Get checked for
 - hepatitis [hep-uh-tie-tus] B
 - hepatitis C
 - sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)
 - HIV

These diseases can harm both you and your baby. Tell your doctor if you or your sex partners have ever had an STD or HIV.
- ◆ Talk with your doctor about all of the medicines you take, whether they are prescription medicines, over-the-counter medicines you buy without prescriptions, and herbal supplements. Ask your doctor if they are safe to take while you are trying to get pregnant or are pregnant.

During Pregnancy

If you know you are pregnant, or think you might be, call your doctor and set up a visit. You will need to visit your doctor many times during your pregnancy. Follow your doctor's schedule for visits and don't miss them!

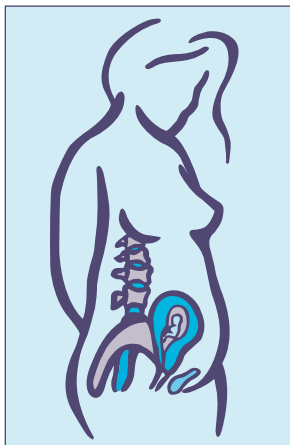
You will notice your body is changing in many ways. These changes may be strange at first, but they are all normal. Try to stay as healthy as you can—for you and your new baby! You can take these actions:

- ◆ Learn about the benefits of breastfeeding your baby. Read the box on breastfeeding on page 73 of this chapter, so you can learn more about how it helps you and your baby.
- ◆ Stop smoking, drinking alcohol, and doing drugs! These behaviors can cause long-term damage to your baby. Ask your doctor for help. You also can talk with someone you trust, such as a member of your faith community, a counselor, or a friend.
- ◆ Keep eating a healthy diet. Eat lots of fruit, vegetables, whole grains, and calcium-rich foods. You need 1000 milligrams (mg) of calcium per day. If you are 18 or younger, you need 1300 mg of calcium each day. Your body is giving a

Stages of Pregnancy

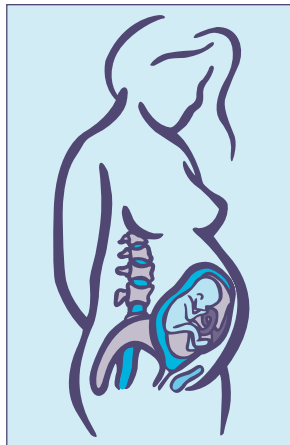
Pregnancy lasts about 40 weeks, counting from the first day of your last menstrual period. The weeks are grouped into three "trimesters." Your doctor will refer to your pregnancy by the age of your baby in weeks.

First trimester



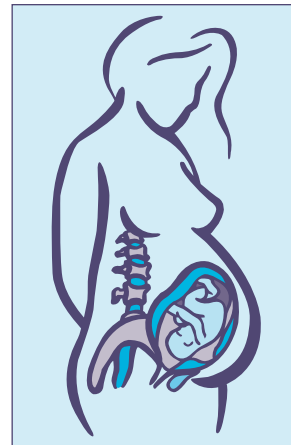
Week 1 to Week 12

Second trimester



Week 13 to Week 26

Third trimester



Week 27 to end of pregnancy

**Limit your fish!
Follow these guidelines.**

Some fish have mercury, which, in high doses, can hurt your baby’s growing brain and nervous system. There are some fish you should avoid eating if you are pregnant.

- Try not to eat shark, swordfish, king mackerel, and tilefish (also called golden or white snapper). These fish have high levels of mercury.
- Many of us enjoy tuna. But, to be safe, don’t eat more than six ounces of “white” or “albacore” tuna or tuna steak each week.
- If you can, buy “light” tuna. But don’t eat more than 12 ounces of light tuna or other cooked fish each week.
- Other fish that are low in mercury are shrimp, salmon, pollock, and catfish.

lot of its calcium to your baby’s growing bones. Drinking at least eight glasses of water a day can help keep you and your baby healthy. Avoid eating a lot of fatty foods such as butter, fatty meats, mayonnaise, and high-fat snack foods. Choose foods lower in fat such as fat-free milk or yogurt, low-fat milk or yogurt, chicken and turkey without the skin, and fish.

- ◆ Don’t eat uncooked or undercooked meats or fish. They can make you sick.
- ◆ Limit caffeine from coffee, tea, sodas, medicines, and chocolates.
- ◆ Take at least 400 micrograms of folic acid daily to help prevent certain types of birth defects. Your doctor may prescribe a daily vitamin that has folic acid. You can also buy folic acid pills at the drug store or grocery store. Keep eating foods high in folic acid like orange juice, other citrus fruit and juices, leafy green vegetables, beans, peanuts, peas, and whole-grain products.

Foods with Calcium

Read the food labels to learn more.

Food	Portion	Calcium (milligrams)
Plain, nonfat yogurt	1 cup	450
Grilled cheese sandwich	1 sandwich	371
American cheese	2 ounces	348
Ricotta cheese, part skim	½ cup	337
Fruit yogurt	1 cup	315

- ◆ Talk to your doctor about all the medicines you take, whether they are prescription medicines, over-the-counter products, and herbal supplements. Ask if they are safe to take while you are pregnant. Most of the time, the medicine a pregnant woman is taking does not affect her baby. But sometimes it can, causing damage or birth defects. Talk with your doctor about which drugs are safe.
 - ◆ Stay active. Being physically active during pregnancy helps you in many ways. It prevents a lot of extra weight gain. It helps you have good posture, which will help you feel better later in your pregnancy. It can help you sleep better and have a shorter, easier labor. If you were physically active before getting pregnant, you should stay active. Continue your low-impact aerobic dance, swimming, or walking.
 - ◆ If you were not physically active before getting pregnant, you still can become active. Start slowly. Try walking at first, then build up to more. Talk to your doctor about which activities are good for you.
 - ◆ Avoid toxic chemicals such as paint, paint thinners, cleaning products, products used to kill bugs, or products that contain lead or mercury. Read the product label to see if it has a pregnancy warning.
 - ◆ Avoid hot tubs, saunas, and x-rays.
 - ◆ Avoid changing cat litter. It can cause an infection that can cause birth defects.
- Wear gloves when gardening in areas that cats may have visited.
- ◆ Get enough sleep. Try to get seven to nine hours every night.
 - ◆ If you can, control the stress in your life. Remember, this is YOUR time. Don't be afraid to say NO to requests for your time and energy.
 - ◆ Learn all you can about pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding, and the early years of childhood. Read books, watch videos, go to a childbirth class, and talk with other moms.

You have choices!

Different types of professionals can help you have your baby.

- **OB or OB/GYN (obstetrician/gynecologist):** A medical doctor who is an expert in prenatal care, labor, and in delivering babies.
- **Certified nurse-midwife (CNM):** An expert in prenatal care, labor, and delivery. CNMs can deliver your baby.
- **Doula:** An expert support person who helps give you physical support during labor and birth. A doula offers advice on how to breathe, relax, move, and position yourself. She also gives emotional support and comfort. Doulas and midwives often work together during a woman's labor.



After Your Baby Is Born

After your baby is born, you really need to keep doing all you can to stay strong and healthy. It takes a lot of energy to care for your precious new child!

- ◆ Be patient with yourself! You're going to do a great job!
- ◆ Rest as much as you can. One way is to sleep when your baby sleeps. Spend time getting to know your baby. Let others help you with chores. Don't be afraid to ask for help.

Call Your Doctor NOW If You Have Any of These Symptoms

- Very heavy vaginal bleeding (more than a heavy period)
- A fever of 101° or higher
- Severe pain in your lower stomach
- Severe headaches or problems seeing that do not go away
- Frequent or burning urination
- Very sad or empty feelings or strange or unusual thoughts that do not go away

- ◆ Try drinking eight glasses of water a day to help you recover from labor and to relieve constipation (when it's hard to make a bowel movement).
- ◆ Keep eating plenty of calcium-rich foods, such as fat-free milk or yogurt, low-fat milk and yogurt, low-fat cheese, and broccoli. You still need 1000 mg of calcium per day for strong, healthy bones.

Then and Now

Preconception care takes place before conception or before a woman even knows she's pregnant. It could improve the health of both mother and baby. Talk with your doctor about the new preconception guidelines. You can find information about them on the Internet at www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/preconception/QandA.htm and www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5506a1.htm .