

Best for You. Best for Baby. 5 Tips for Preventing Birth Defects.

Theme Resources

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The following are steps that women can take to prepare and maintain a healthy pregnancy as well as reduce the chance of birth defects.

Tip 1: Be sure to take 400 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid every day.

Folic acid is a B Vitamin. Our bodies use it to make new cells like the hair, skin and nails. During early development, folic acid helps form the neural tube. Folic acid is very important because it can help prevent some major birth defects of the baby's brain (anencephaly) and spine (spina bifida). These types of birth defects of the brain and spine are called neural tube defects.



Folate is a general term to describe many different forms of vitamin B9. Folate is found in foods like leafy green vegetables, citrus fruits, and beans. Folic acid is added to some foods such as rice, breads, pastas, and cereals. These foods are labeled "enriched." Folic acid is the only form of folate that has been shown to help prevent neural tube defects. In addition to eating foods with folate from a varied diet, you can:

- Take a vitamin that has folic acid in it every day.
 - Vitamins can be found at most local pharmacies and grocery stores. Check the label on the bottle to be sure it contains 100% of the daily value (DV) of folic acid, which is **400mcg**.
 - Most vitamins sold in the United States have the recommended amount of folic acid women need each day but be sure to check the label.
- Eat fortified foods.
 - You can find folic acid in some breads, pasta, breakfast cereals, and corn masa flour.
 - Be sure to check the nutrition facts label and look for one that has "100%" next to folate.

Social Media:

Trying to be your healthiest self before & during #pregnancy? Be sure to take 400 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid every day. #Best4YouBest4Baby

Resources:

Folic Acid Recommendations | CDC

<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/folicacid/recommendations.html>

Folic Acid Fact Sheet | March of Dimes

<https://www.marchofdimes.org/pregnancy/folic-acid.aspx>

Why, How, When, What | Baby Center

https://www.babycenter.com/0_folic-acid-why-you-need-it-before-and-during-pregnancy_476.bc

Folic Acid | Office on Women's Health

<https://www.womenshealth.gov/a-z-topics/folic-acid>

Tip 2: Book a visit with your healthcare provider before stopping or starting any medicine.

Many women need to take medicine to stay healthy, and there are often benefits to continuing your treatment throughout your pregnancy. If you are trying to have a baby or are just thinking about it, now is a great time to start getting ready for pregnancy by talking with your doctor about medications you may be taking.

Women who are already pregnant or think that they could be pregnant should also see their healthcare providers. Start prenatal care right away. It is important to see your healthcare provider regularly throughout pregnancy. So be sure to keep all prenatal care appointments.

It is not easy to study medicine use in pregnancy. This means there may not be easy answers about possible risks for some medications when used in pregnancy. If you are planning to become pregnant, discuss your current medications with your healthcare providers, such as your doctor or pharmacist.

There are often benefits to continuing your treatment throughout your pregnancy. However, if you and your healthcare provider decide to change your medicines, discussing a treatment plan before a pregnancy can give you time to consider all options that can help keep you and your developing baby as healthy as possible.

Planning how to take care of your health conditions before you become pregnant can help keep you and your developing baby healthy. Don't forget to talk about your family history when visiting your healthcare provider! Based on your family history, your doctor might alter your care or refer you for genetic or nutritional counseling.

Social Media:

Visiting your healthcare provider before & during pregnancy is key, especially if stopping or starting any medication. Have questions about medication during pregnancy? Visit <http://bit.ly/Best4UBaby> for expert information. #Best4YouBest4Baby

Resources:

Factsheets on Medications | MotherToBaby

<https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets-parent/>

MotherToBaby Pregnancy Study | MotherToBaby

<https://mothertobaby.org/ongoing-study/no-current-health-condition-2/>

Medication and Pregnancy | American Pregnancy Association

<http://americanpregnancy.org/medication/medication-and-pregnancy/>

Medication Tips and Facts | U.S. Food and Drug Administration

<https://www.fda.gov/forconsumers/byaudience/forwomen/ucm118567.htm>

Treating for Two | CDC

<https://www.cdc.gov/pregnancy/meds/treatingfortwo/index.html>

Over-the-Counter Medication in Pregnancy | American Family Physician

<https://www.aafp.org/afp/2003/0615/p2517.html>



Tip 3: Become up-to-date with all vaccines, including the flu shot.

Vaccines help protect you and your baby. Some vaccinations, such as the flu (influenza) vaccine and the Tdap vaccine (adult tetanus, diphtheria, and acellular pertussis vaccine), are specifically recommended during each pregnancy.



Having the right vaccinations at the right time can help keep you and your baby healthy. Get a flu shot and Tdap vaccine during each pregnancy to help protect yourself and your baby.

Flu: You can get the flu shot before or during each pregnancy. Pregnant women with flu have an increased risk of serious problems for their pregnancy, including preterm birth. Getting a flu shot is the first and most important step in protecting against flu. The flu shot given during pregnancy has been shown to protect both mom and baby (for up to 6 months after delivery) from the flu.

Tdap: You should get the Tdap vaccine near the end of each pregnancy (weeks 27 – 36). After getting the shot, your body will make protective antibodies (proteins made by the body to fight off diseases) and will pass some of the antibodies to your baby before birth. These antibodies give your baby some short-term protection against whooping cough (also called pertussis). These antibodies can also protect your baby from some of the more serious complications of whooping cough. Partners/spouses and other family members who live in the same home or will be helping to take care of a new baby should also receive the Tdap vaccine before the baby is born.

Social Media:

Not all birth defects can be prevented. But you can increase your chances of having a healthy baby by being your healthiest self both before & during pregnancy. Vaccines help protect you & your developing baby against serious diseases. #Best4YouBest4Baby

Resources:

Seasonal Influenza in Pregnancy Fact Sheet | MotherToBaby

<https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/seasonal-influenza-the-flu-pregnancy/>

Flu Vaccine Safety and Pregnancy | CDC

https://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/vaccine/qa_vacpregnant.htm

Get the Whooping Cough Vaccine While You Are Pregnant | CDC

<http://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/pregnant/mom/get-vaccinated.html>

Vaccinations and Pregnancy | March of Dimes

<https://www.marchofdimes.org/pregnancy/vaccinations-during-pregnancy.aspx>

Vaccines in Pregnancy/Breastfeeding | MotherToBaby

<https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/vaccines-pregnancy/>

<https://mothertobaby.org/es/fact-sheets/las-vacunaz/> (Spanish)

Tdap Vaccine in Pregnancy/Breastfeeding | MotherToBaby

<https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/tetanus-diphtheria-pertussis-tdap-vaccine-pregnancy/>

<https://mothertobaby.org/es/fact-sheets/la-vacuna-contra-influenza-estacional-flu-shot-durante-el-embarazo/> (Spanish)

Hepatitis Vaccine in Pregnancy/Breastfeeding | MotherToBaby

<https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/hepatitis-vaccine-pregnancy/>

<https://mothertobaby.org/es/fact-sheets/hepatitis-la-vacuna-durante-el-embarazo/> (Spanish)

Tip 4: Before you get pregnant, try to reach a healthy weight.

Obesity increases the risk for several serious birth defects and other pregnancy complications. If you are underweight, overweight, or obese, talk with your healthcare provider about ways to reach and maintain a healthy weight before you get pregnant. Eating healthy foods and being physically active are great ways to prepare for pregnancy.



One size does not fit all. During pregnancy, follow the guidelines for weight gain that match your weight before pregnancy. Talk to your provider about making physical activity a part of healthy pregnancy.

Social Media:

Prepping for #pregnancy? Work with your healthcare provider now to achieve a safe & healthy weight for you & your baby. #Best4YouBest4Baby

Resources:

Weight Gain during Pregnancy | CDC

<https://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/maternalinfanthealth/pregnancy-weight-gain.htm>

Women's Weight before Pregnancy and Child Development | CDC

<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/developmentaldisabilities/features/keyfinding-women-weight-child-development.html>

Eating for Two When Over or Under Weight | American Pregnancy Association

<http://americanpregnancy.org/pregnancy-health/eating-for-two/>

Tracking your Weight | CDC

https://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/pdfs/maternal-infant-health/pregnancy-weight-gain/tracker/single/Obese_Weight_Tracker_508Tagged.pdf

Exercise in Pregnancy/Breastfeeding | MotherToBaby

<https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/exercise-pregnancy/>

In Spanish: <https://mothertobaby.org/es/fact-sheets/el-ejercicio/>

Pregnancy and Eating Disorders | The National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA)

<https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/pregnancy-and-eating-disorders>

Being Overweight During Pregnancy | March of Dimes

<https://www.marchofdimes.org/pregnancy/being-overweight-during-pregnancy.aspx>

Tip 5: Boost your health by avoiding harmful substances during pregnancy, such as alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.

Alcohol: There is no known safe amount of alcohol during pregnancy or when trying to get pregnant. A developing baby is exposed to the same concentration of alcohol as the mother during pregnancy. This can result in a range of lifelong physical, behavioral, and intellectual disabilities. Alcohol use in pregnancy can also increase the risk of miscarriage, stillbirth, prematurity, and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). In addition, alcohol may make it harder for a woman to become pregnant.



Alcohol can have negative effects on a baby's development at any time during pregnancy, including before a woman even knows she is pregnant. Therefore, it is important to stop drinking alcohol when trying to get pregnant.

Tobacco: Today, tobacco can be consumed in multiple ways; this includes traditional forms like cigarettes, cigars, pipes, chew, snuff, and hookah as well as newer forms like e-cigarettes/vapes.

Smoking causes cancer, heart disease, and other major health problems. Smoking during pregnancy can harm the placenta and a developing baby and can cause certain birth defects. The placenta grows in your uterus (womb) and supplies the baby with food and oxygen through the umbilical cord. Cigarette smoke has over 4,000 chemicals. When you smoke during pregnancy, chemicals like nicotine, carbon monoxide and tar damage the placenta and/or pass through the placenta and umbilical cord to reach your baby's bloodstream. Quitting smoking will help you feel better and provide a healthier environment for your baby.

Because they are relatively new and are not well-regulated, there is less information known about the effects of e-cigarettes on pregnancy. Until more information is available, it is recommended that pregnant women not use e-cigarettes.

Marijuana: During pregnancy, the chemicals in marijuana (in particular, tetrahydrocannabinol or THC) pass through mom to a developing baby, and can harm a baby's development. In animal studies, combined exposure to even low levels of marijuana in combination with alcohol have been associated with impaired brain development of the baby (1, 2). More research is needed to better understand how marijuana may affect mom and baby during pregnancy. However, it is recommended that pregnant women not use marijuana.

Prescription Opioids: Painkillers such as codeine, morphine, and oxycodone may be prescribed following an injury, surgery, or dental work. Any type of opioid exposure during pregnancy can cause neonatal abstinence syndrome, a condition in which the newborn experiences from withdrawal from certain drugs after exposure during pregnancy. If you are pregnant and taking an opioid, talk to your doctor before making any changes. Ask about options for opioid treatment to decide what is best for you and your pregnancy.

Other Drugs: Using certain drugs during pregnancy can cause health problems for a woman and her developing baby. If you are pregnant/trying to get pregnant and cannot stop using drugs—please ask for help! A healthcare provider can help you with counseling, treatment, and other support services.

Social Media:

What is best for you is also best for your baby. Stop using harmful substances during pregnancy (including #alcohol & #tobacco) to avoid harmful effects on your baby. #Best4YouBest4Baby

References and Resources:

1. Boa-Amponsem O, Zhang C, Mukhopadhyay S, Ardrey I, Cole GJ. Ethanol and cannabinoids interact to alter behavior in zebrafish fetal alcohol spectrum disorder model. (2020) Birth Defects Res 111:775-788.
2. Breit KR, Zamudio B, Thomas, JD. The effects of alcohol and cannabinoid exposure during the brain growth spurt on behavioral development in rats. (2020) Birth Defects Res 111:760-774.

Substance use in Pregnancy | World Health Organization

http://www.who.int/substance_abuse/activities/pregnancy_substance_use/en/

Using Illegal Drugs during Pregnancy | American Pregnancy Association

<http://americanpregnancy.org/pregnancy-health/illegal-drugs-during-pregnancy/>

Alcohol Use in Pregnancy | CDC

<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/fasd/alcohol-use.html>

Alcohol during Pregnancy | March of Dimes

<https://www.marchofdimes.org/pregnancy/alcohol-during-pregnancy.aspx>

Alcohol in Pregnancy/Breastfeeding | MotherToBaby

<https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/alcohol-pregnancy/>

In Spanish: <https://mothertobaby.org/es/fact-sheets/el-alcohol/>

Cigarette Smoke in Pregnancy/Breastfeeding | MotherToBaby

<https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/cigarette-smoking-pregnancy/>

In Spanish: <https://mothertobaby.org/es/fact-sheets/el-fumar-cigarro-el-embarazo/>

Prescription Opioids in Pregnancy | March of Dimes

<https://www.marchofdimes.org/pregnancy/prescription-opioids-during-pregnancy.aspx>

Heroin in Pregnancy/Breastfeeding |

MotherToBaby <https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/heroin/>

In Spanish: <https://mothertobaby.org/es/fact-sheets/heroina/>

Cocaine in Pregnancy/Breastfeeding | MotherToBaby

<https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/cocaine-pregnancy/>

In Spanish: <https://mothertobaby.org/es/fact-sheets/la-cocaina/>

Marijuana in Pregnancy/Breastfeeding | MotherToBaby

<https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/marijuana-pregnancy/>

In Spanish: <https://mothertobaby.org/es/fact-sheets/marihuana/>

Methamphetamine in Pregnancy/Breastfeeding |

MotherToBaby <https://mothertobaby.org/fact->

[sheets/methamphetamine/](#)

In Spanish: <https://mothertobaby.org/es/fact-sheets/la-metanfetamina/>

Codeine in Pregnancy/Breastfeeding |

MotherToBaby <https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/codeine/>

In Spanish: <https://mothertobaby.org/es/fact-sheets/la-codeina/>

Marijuana use in Pregnancy | CDC

<https://www.cdc.gov/marijuana/factsheets/pregnancy.htm>