

# Dads play an important role in a healthy pregnancy.

## Education Flyer

### Best for Dad. Best for Baby. 5 Tips for Dads to Help Prevent Birth Defects.

When David thought about his future and the dad he wanted to be, he made a commitment to himself to provide for his family as best he could. As he talked with his healthcare provider, he was reminded that his commitment to his family starts even before his children are born.

Dads like David will contribute half of the biological building blocks for their children. Keeping himself healthy will help David pass along healthy genes and give his children their best chance at a healthy start. When fathers are involved during pregnancy, babies have fewer complications at birth.

Like David, you may be thinking about the family you may have one day. What is best for dad before and during pregnancy is also best for your baby.



#### Tip 1: Try to maintain a healthy weight

- Incorporate eating healthy food and regular physical activity into your daily routine. Obesity in men has been linked to lower fertility and a higher risk of insulin dysregulation issues in their children (1).

#### Tip 2: Boost your health by avoiding harmful substances

- Protect yourself and your partner by quitting smoking and avoiding secondhand smoke and air pollution.
- Do not drink excessively or use certain drugs, such as cocaine or heroin.
- Avoid excessive use of marijuana. Use of marijuana has been linked to lower sperm production and lower sperm quality.
- Avoid use of anabolic androgenic steroids, particularly when trying to conceive. Use of testosterone derivatives has been associated with short-term subfertility and longer-term decreases in normal testosterone production (2).
- If you require pain management or addiction treatment, talk to your healthcare provider about alternatives to long-term use of opioids. Long-term use of opioids can interfere with testosterone production, which is important for sperm production.

### Tip 3: Avoid harmful workplace exposures

- Ask questions about hazards in your workplace. You have a legal right to receive information on hazards in your workplace.
- Learn how to avoid bringing work hazards home on your skin, clothes, and shoes.

### Tip 4: Avoid infections

- Get the flu shot and the whooping cough vaccine to avoid passing these viruses to your pregnant partner and your newborn infant.
- Protect yourself and your partner from insects known to carry diseases such as Zika virus. Zika can cause birth defects.
  - When mosquitos are active, wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants when outside.
  - Use Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) registered insect repellents with one of the following active ingredients: DEET, picaridin, IR3535, or oil of lemon eucalyptus (para-menthane-3, 8-diol).
  - If you are planning to conceive with your partner, consider avoiding travel to an area with Zika virus or wait at least three months after your return before trying to conceive with your partner.
- Practice good hygiene.
  - Wash your hands often with soap and water.
- Talk to your healthcare provider about how to prevent sexually transmitted infections (STDs).

### Tip 5: Maintain good mental well-being and be supportive of your partner during pregnancy

- Talk to your healthcare provider about resources to plan for mental well-being during parenthood. Some women experience depression during pregnancy or immediately after birth, and this can impact their partner.
- Take an interest in your partner's health during pregnancy. Infants have fewer complications at birth when fathers are involved with their partners during pregnancy (3).
- Talk to your healthcare provider about your role in care and development of your future child (4).

### References and Resources

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3. Alio AP, Kornosky JL, Mbah AK, Marty PJ and Salihi HM. The impact of paternal involvement on feto- infant morbidity among Whites, Blacks and Hispanics. (2010) *Matern Child Health J* 14:735-41.
4. Coleman WL, Garfield C and the Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and FamilyHealth. Fathers and pediatricians: enhancing men's roles in the care and development of their children. American Academy of Pediatrics Clinical Report. (2004) *Pediatrics* 113:1406-11.
5. Links to information on drugs and male fertility:  
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<https://academic.oup.com/humrep/article/29/8/1629/2913908>  
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