



Having a Baby (Especially for Teens)

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What is prenatal care?

Prenatal care is the health care you get while you are pregnant. It includes medical care, education, and counseling. The earlier you get prenatal care, the better your chances are for a healthy pregnancy and baby.

What may happen at my first prenatal care visit?

At your first prenatal care visit, your health care provider will ask you many questions. You will be asked the date of the first day of your last menstrual period. Your health care provider uses this date to figure out how many weeks pregnant you are and estimate when your baby will be born (your due date). You will have a complete physical exam, which may include a **pelvic exam**. You also may have a urine test and some blood tests. You may be tested for certain **sexually transmitted infections (STIs)**.

What are childbirth classes?

In childbirth classes, you can learn more about pregnancy, giving birth, breastfeeding, and being a parent. There may be special classes for pregnant teens. There also are classes that can teach you how to take care of your baby. This includes how to feed, diaper, and bathe your baby and how to keep your baby healthy and safe. You can ask other mothers, family members, or health care staff to teach you, too.

What are things I can do to help ensure a healthy pregnancy?

It is important to eat healthy foods, exercise regularly, and get plenty of rest. You should avoid things that could harm your baby, such as alcohol, tobacco, and illegal drugs. You also need to talk to your health care provider about any prescription drugs you are taking as well as drugs you can buy without a prescription, like vitamins and pain relievers.

Why is it important to eat a healthy diet during pregnancy?

Eating the right food is good for your health and helps your baby grow. This is the time to make healthy choices. An online program called MyPlate (www.choosemyplate.gov) can help you plan a balanced diet. MyPlate makes it easy to remember what to eat at each meal. One half of your plate should be fruits and vegetables. The other half should be grains and protein foods. You need a small amount of dairy foods at each meal as well.

Are there any foods that I should avoid?

While you are pregnant, there are some foods you should not eat or eat only in small amounts:

- Certain types of cooked fish—While you are pregnant, avoid shark, tilefish, king mackerel, and swordfish. You should limit albacore tuna (but not “chunk light tuna”) to about one small can a week. These fish may have high levels of mercury, which can be harmful during pregnancy.
- Caffeine—Caffeine is found in coffee, tea, chocolate, energy drinks, and soft drinks. It is a good idea to limit your daily intake of caffeine to less than 200 mg, which is the amount in two small cups of brewed coffee.
- Sushi—Raw fish may be harmful during pregnancy.
- Unpasteurized milk and cheese—These foods can cause a disease called *listeriosis*. Avoid cheeses that are made with raw milk (such as some feta, queso fresco, and bleu cheeses).

How much weight should I gain during pregnancy?

How much weight you should gain during pregnancy depends on your weight before you were pregnant. If you were underweight, you need to gain as much as 40 pounds. If you were a normal weight, you should gain 25–35 pounds. If you were overweight or obese, you need to gain as little as 11 pounds.

What vitamins are necessary during pregnancy?

An important vitamin for pregnant women is a B vitamin called folic acid. Getting enough folic acid before and during pregnancy may help prevent major birth defects of the baby’s brain and spine. During pregnancy, you should get 600 micrograms of folic acid daily. Iron also is important. More iron is needed during pregnancy to make extra blood that carries oxygen to your baby.

How can I be sure I am getting all of the necessary vitamins during pregnancy?

One way to get the all the vitamins and minerals you need during pregnancy is to take a multivitamin pill. There are special ones for pregnant women. At your first prenatal care visit, tell your health care provider about any other vitamins you have been taking. You may want to bring the bottles with you. Excess amounts of some vitamins can be harmful. Your health care provider will help you decide which vitamin pills to take.

Why is exercise important during pregnancy?

Exercise can help give you more energy, ease some of the discomforts of pregnancy, and make you stronger for labor and delivery. Most teens should exercise 30 minutes or more on most, if not all, days of the week. The 30 minutes do not have to be all at one time. For example, you can do three 10-minute periods of exercise.

Should I expect to feel tired during pregnancy?

During early and late pregnancy, it is common to feel very tired. It is important to get plenty of rest while you are pregnant—your body needs 8.5–9.5 hours of sleep each night. Listen to your body. During the day, take breaks and rest when you feel tired. Exercise and a healthy diet may help boost your energy.

Should I be taking medications during pregnancy?

Some teens need to take medicine during pregnancy for their health or for the health of the baby. Tell your health care provider about any prescription medicines you are taking or bring the bottles with you to your first prenatal visit. Be sure to talk to your health care provider before taking any over-the-counter medicines, herbal remedies, vitamins, or minerals.

Can using alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, or other illegal drugs cause harm during pregnancy?

Alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, and other drugs can harm you and your baby. If you use any of these substances, now is a good time to quit. If you want to stop, but cannot, ask your health care provider. He or she can help you find ways to quit.

Do teens have any special pregnancy risks?

Pregnant teens are at higher risk of certain health problems (such as high blood pressure or anemia) than pregnant women who are older. Pregnant teens are more likely to go into labor too early. This is called *preterm* birth. These risks are even greater for teens who are younger than 15 years or for those who do not get prenatal care.

Teens also are likely to have STIs. You may have an STI and not know it. If you have sex during pregnancy, you could get an STI. Using a latex condom can help prevent getting or spreading some STIs (see FAQ009 “How to Prevent Sexually Transmitted Infections”).

What should I know about breastfeeding?

Breastfeeding is the best way to feed your baby. Breast milk helps the baby resist diseases and allergies. Breastfeeding also is cheaper than bottle-feeding and may help you return to your prepregnancy weight more quickly. Breastfeeding is recommended for the first 6 months of the baby's life, but breastfeeding only for a few weeks or months has health benefits for the baby.

When you go back to school or to work, you can still feed your baby breast milk. You will need to get a breast pump to collect and store milk. Your workplace or school should have a place where you can do this.

When should I see my health care provider after I have the baby?

You should see your health care provider 4–6 weeks after your baby is born. During this visit, your health care provider will do a complete exam to be sure that you are healing and in good health. This is a good time to ask questions about your future health, breastfeeding, **birth control**, weight loss, sex, or your emotions.

Glossary

Birth Control: Methods to prevent pregnancy.

Listeriosis: A type of food-borne illness caused by bacteria found in unpasteurized milk, hot dogs, luncheon meats, and smoked seafood.

Pelvic Exam: A physical examination of a woman's reproductive organs.

Prenatal Care: A program of care for a pregnant woman before the birth of her baby.

Preterm: Born before 37 weeks of pregnancy.

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs): Infections that are spread by sexual contact, including chlamydia, gonorrhea, human papillomavirus infection, herpes, syphilis, and infection with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV, the cause of acquired immunodeficiency syndrome [AIDS]).

If you have further questions, contact your obstetrician–gynecologist.

FAQ103: Designed as an aid to patients, this document sets forth current information and opinions related to women's health. The information does not dictate an exclusive course of treatment or procedure to be followed and should not be construed as excluding other acceptable methods of practice. Variations, taking into account the needs of the individual patient, resources, and limitations unique to the institution or type of practice, may be appropriate.

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