

BEFORE YOU BECOME PREGNANT

A HEALTHY START. Many women do not know they are pregnant until a month or so has passed. The best time to begin to prepare for a healthy start for a healthy baby is before you become pregnant.

PLAN AHEAD. Ask yourself and your partner, “Are we ready to be parents?” Look at your future goals, your finances and your work situation. Deciding to have a child is one of the biggest decisions you will ever make.

EAT HEALTHY FOODS. Choose a variety of foods such as breads and cereals, fruits, vegetables, low-fat milk (1%), cheeses, lean meats and fish. Avoid coffee and soda pop.

TAKE A MULTIVITAMIN which contains 0.4mg of folic acid once a day. A lack of folic acid (a B vitamin) can increase the risk of having a baby with a defect in the spine. Begin taking your multivitamin before you become pregnant.

EXERCISE REGULARLY. Many activities provide good exercise such as walking, swimming, aerobic dancing, bicycling. It is recommended that you exercise for 20 to 30 minutes three times per week. You will feel better while getting your body ready for pregnancy.

KEEP A CALENDAR of your menstrual cycles. Knowing the first day of your last menstrual period will help to determine when your baby is due.

DENTAL CARE, take care of your teeth. Brush and floss daily. Visit your dentist for regular cleanings and dental care. Some studies suggest gum disease may be associated with preterm labor and premature birth.

IMMUNIZATIONS. If you are not up to date on your immunizations, you may need a measles, mumps, rubella (MMR) vaccine. Exposure to rubella during pregnancy can cause serious birth defects or miscarriage. A MMR vaccine cannot be given if you are already pregnant or planning on getting pregnant within the next three months. A pre-pregnancy check up is a good opportunity to ask about whether you need an MMR shot.

SOME MEDICINES, prescribed or bought over-the-counter, may cause harm to your baby as it develops. If you are taking a medication, you should check with your doctor or nurse-midwife about continuing this medication before and during pregnancy.

SMOKING or being around others who smoke can increase the possibility of miscarriage or of having a baby born too early or too small. Smoking is also one of the greatest health risks to women. Stop or cut down now for your better health and your baby's.

AVOID DRUGS AND ALCOHOL. It is not known how much alcohol is “safe” so the best decision is to avoid all alcohol while you are pregnant. Heavy drinking during pregnancy can lead to “fetal alcohol syndrome”, a pattern of physical and mental defects. Street drugs such as marijuana, cocaine, “speed” and others can also cause serious harm to your unborn baby.

CHOOSE a doctor or nurse-midwife for prenatal care and start your prenatal care early.....as soon as you think you might be pregnant.

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