Prenatal Health

How you can prepare for pregnancy

Take a multivitamin supplement that contains 400 micrograms folate (folic acid). This prevents certain birth defects, such as spina bifida. Other good sources include fortified cereal and whole wheat bread. If there is a family history of spina bifida, you should consult a physician about dosages of folic acid.

A fetus is most susceptible to environmental effects (such as medications, infections, etc.) during the first 1-2 months of pregnancy. A woman may not even know she is pregnant until she is 2 or 3 months along. If you are not using contraception, consider yourself potentially pregnant and avoid all medications if possible. Talk with your provider about questions or concerns regarding medications you are currently taking.

If you have high blood pressure, a seizure disorder, asthma, or any inherited diseases, talk with your doctor before getting pregnant. Your doctor may want to modify your treatment and may be able to prescribe medicine that is safer for the developing baby.

Before taking any medication, discuss with your clinician how it may affect your pregnancy. This includes prescription and non-prescription drugs such as pain remedies (ibuprofen), as well as herbal or other remedies. Avoid large doses of anything including vitamins.

Keep track of menstrual cycles.

Eat nutritious foods. Make sure your diet includes plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables, especially green, leafy vegetables. Drink 3 glasses of milk daily (1500 mg of calcium). Avoid eating fish that may contain high levels of mercury, such as shark, swordfish, king mackerel, tile fish, and fish from noncommercial sources.

Avoid elevated body temperature. Elevated temperature can increase the risk of abnormal fetal development. Avoid activities like hot tubs or saunas.

Avoid exposure to abdominal x-rays.

Exercise. If you are not exercising, start now. Choose a form of exercise that you enjoy and that does not require a lot of balance or risk of abdominal injury. Strive to exercise every day and continue doing so while pregnant. Make modifications as necessary to ensure the safety of your baby.

Contact an OB/GYN doctor as soon as possible after you know you are pregnant. Most OB/GYN physicians schedule new patients according to the due date of the baby. It can occasionally be difficult to get an appointment unless you schedule with them early.

Avoid toxic substances. Do not use illicit drugs. Avoid exposure to toxic chemicals.
Confirm pregnancy early. If you think you may be pregnant, a blood test can be accurate between 7-10 days after conception. A urine test is most accurate 2 weeks after conception.

Stop drinking alcoholic beverages. This includes medications, such as Nyquil®, which contains alcohol.

If you are a smoker, stop.