

Preparing for Pregnancy



There are things you can do before and during pregnancy to give your baby a healthier start. The sooner you start the better.

What can I do to give my baby a healthier start?

Eat well: Eating a healthy diet will help make sure you and your unborn baby get the nutrients your growing bodies need. Each day, drink 6 – 8 glasses of water and eat a variety of foods from these food groups:

- breads, cereals, rice, pasta and noodles
- vegetables and legumes
- fruit
- milk, yoghurt, cheese
- lean meat, fish, poultry, eggs, nuts & legumes

Take folic acid: Take a 0.5 mg folic acid tablet every day for at least one month before you get pregnant and for the first three months of pregnancy. This reduces the chance of your baby having spina bifida or other neural tube defects by up to 70%. For more information see the Folic Acid for Women brochure in this series.

Exercise regularly: Start low intensity exercise such as walking or swimming before you try to get pregnant. These are safe to continue throughout pregnancy. There are special fitness classes available for pregnant women. During pregnancy, doing pelvic floor exercises will also reduce your risk of incontinence. For further advice speak to your doctor or physiotherapist.

Build your supports: Pregnancy can be a demanding time physically and emotionally for some women. Women often find it helpful to think about who they can ask to support them during pregnancy, and once the baby arrives. Don't be afraid to call on helpful family and friends, and let them know exactly what they can do to help.





Have a health check: Having a check-up with a doctor, an obstetrician or a midwife before you become pregnant can help to make sure you start your pregnancy as healthy as possible. At the health check, you can discuss:

- the lifestyle you and your partner have (nutrition, exercise, alcohol intake, smoking or drug use)
- any disease or disability that you or your partner have, or that runs in your family
- any abnormality that a baby in your family was born with
- the immunisations you've had
- any health problems during a past pregnancy (diabetes, high blood pressure, miscarriage, rhesus or Rh negative blood type)
- operations you've had
- any prescription or over the counter medications, herbal preparations or aromatherapy products you use or have used
- being over 35

Before pregnancy is a good time for you and your partner to support each other to make healthy changes. It may be helpful for your partner to go with you for the health check, so that you can learn together.

Have a Pap smear: A Pap smear before you get pregnant will check for changes to cells in the cervix. Early detection of changes can prevent cancer forming.

Talk to your doctor about sexually transmitted infections (STI): Some STIs don't have any symptoms. STIs like chlamydia, gonorrhoea or herpes can make it harder to get pregnant or harm your unborn baby. If you think you might be at risk of having an STI tell your doctor so that you can decide together whether to have some screening tests. Also tell your doctor if you have had an STI in the past, or if you have an unusual vaginal discharge. STIs can be treated before you get pregnant.

Have a blood test to check your immunity: If you become infected with German measles (rubella) while you're pregnant, it can harm the unborn baby. If your immunity is low you may need a rubella booster at least 2 - 3 months before you plan to become pregnant.

Visit your dentist: Find out how to prevent dental problems like tooth decay and gingivitis, to avoid having treatments during pregnancy.

What should I avoid to stay healthier during pregnancy?

Nobody knows exactly how much alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs can harm your unborn baby. Research has found that these substances do increase the risk of miscarriage, or having a stillborn, premature or low birthweight baby. Low birthweight babies can have serious health problems like heart and breathing difficulties, cerebral palsy and other life-long developmental delays. It's best not to smoke, drink or use drugs when you're pregnant or breast-feeding. If you need support to cut down or quit, there are people listed on the back of this brochure who can help. Small changes can make big differences.

Smoking: Smoking or being exposed to passive smoking increases your chances of serious health risks for you and the baby. Smoking around the baby is a risk factor for SIDS. Before pregnancy is a good time for both you and your partner to get support to quit smoking.

Alcohol: It is not clear how much alcohol, if any, is safe to drink during pregnancy. It is known that alcohol crosses the placenta and gets into the baby's blood. The more you drink the greater the risk to your unborn baby. Binge or heavy drinking throughout pregnancy is especially harmful. No alcohol is the safest choice for a healthy pregnancy. If you do choose to drink, make it no more than 2 standard drinks a day, spread over at least two hours.

Recreational drugs: If you use recreational drugs such as marijuana, heroin, and amphetamine-type stimulants while you're pregnant, they will pass through your placenta to your baby. They may harm your baby or cause it to have withdrawal symptoms after birth. Get support to stop using drugs.

Caffeine: Too much caffeine may increase your chances of having a miscarriage, premature birth or a low birthweight baby. Four or more cups of coffee per day throughout pregnancy is linked with an increased risk of SIDS. Cut back on caffeine containing drinks (tea, coffee, cola and energy drinks). If you do have drinks with caffeine in them, do not drink more than 2 - 3 cups a day. Most chocolate contains a caffeine-like substance.

Chemicals and Poisons: It's best to avoid contact with lead-based paints, herbicides, pesticides, aerosols, oven cleaners and solvents.



Listeria: This is a bacterium found in some foods that has serious effects in pregnancy. Avoid foods that have a high risk of contamination such as:

- cold takeaway chickens
- cold meats
- uncooked meat
- unpasteurised dairy products
- salad from salad bars
- pate
- prepared foods stored in the fridge for more than 12 hours
- soft cheeses (brie, camembert or ricotta - safe if cooked in a meal)
- raw and smoked seafood

Toxoplasmosis: This is a parasite that is found in cat faeces. If you become infected while you are pregnant, you can pass the infection to your baby. This can happen by touching contaminated surfaces such as cat litter trays or soils or by eating meat that isn't properly cooked. Avoid contact with it by wearing gloves when gardening or changing cat litter, and only eating well-cooked meat.

What if my pregnancy was unplanned?

Having a health check and making healthy changes will still benefit you and your baby if you are already pregnant, and still increase your chances of having a healthy baby.

For further information about anything in this brochure:

- Phone Women's & Children's Hospital Health Information Centre on 8161 6875
- Phone Women's Healthline on 1300 882 880 for free confidential health counselling
- Contact Community Health Centres & physiotherapists for information on pregnancy exercise classes
- Phone QUIT SA on 131 848 for support to quit smoking
- Phone Pregnancy Drugs Information Centre on 8161 7222
- Phone Alcohol & Drug Information Service on 1300 131 340
- Check websites www.dhs.sa.gov.au/pregnancy www.healthysa.sa.gov.au www.anzfa.gov.au www.adf.org.au
- Talk to a doctor, community health nurse, midwife, or dietician

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