

Did you know . . .

All of your baby's important organs form very early. Birth defects may happen **before** a woman has missed a period and knows she is pregnant.



You can lower the risk of birth defects and pregnancy problems by making good health choices **before** and **during** your pregnancy.

TIME

Choosing WHEN you get pregnant is important.

 **Family Planning.** Planning your future is important. Family Planning lets you decide if you want a child, **when** that will happen, and **helps** you have a healthy baby. If you are having sex, it's important to use a method of birth control until you are ready to have a baby.

 **Age.** Women under 18 and over 34 who have babies are more likely to have problems with pregnancy or have small babies.

 **Before You Stop Your Birth Control.** Go to a clinic or health care provider for a physical exam and counseling. Go in for this visit at least three months before you want to become pregnant. Ask your clinic or doctor about taking vitamins like Folic Acid.



HABITS

Habits before you get pregnant may be good or bad.

 **Eating.** Eat healthy food and regular meals and cut down on the caffeine. To reduce the risk of having a baby with a neural tube defect, take in 0.4 mg of Folic Acid each day (chicken livers or pasta, bread, or rice labeled as having 100% of the RDA of Folic Acid). Women who have had a pregnancy with a previous neural tube defect or whose partner has fathered a pregnancy with a neural tube defect should take a 4.0 mg Folic Acid supplement while trying to get pregnant. Talk to your doctor or nurse about this.

 **Exercise.** Regular exercise helps you feel better and gets your body ready for pregnancy.

 **Smoking.** Smoking or being around others' smoke can cause your baby to be born too small or too soon to be healthy. Smoking marijuana can cause these problems too.

 **Drugs and Medicines.** Using illegal drugs or even some medicines (prescribed or bought over-the-counter) can cause miscarriage, brain damage, addiction, and/or death to your baby.

 **Alcohol.** Drinking alcohol (beer, wine, wine coolers, hard liquor and even cough and cold medicines) can cause birth defects, mental retardation and even death to your baby.

Smoking, drugs, medicines and alcohol...all of these can be harmful depending how much and how often you use them.

 **Other hazards.** Working with certain metals and chemicals (such as lead, paint, oven cleaners, bug killers, gasoline and car exhaust) can cause pregnancy problems. They also could harm your baby. Other hazards include eating raw meats, handling used cat litter or being around animals or people with certain diseases.

HEALTH

Before you get pregnant - talk to your nurse, doctor or clinic about:

 **Medical Conditions.** Medical problems (such as diabetes, epilepsy, high blood pressure, heart or kidney disease, infections, hepatitis or anemia) need to be treated before pregnancy.

 **Immunizations.** Make sure your immunizations are up to date. They can prevent some diseases like German Measles (rubella) which can cause serious birth defects.

 **Family Health.** Does anyone in your family have a birth defect, inherited disease, or mental retardation? Some diseases and birth problems can run in families.

 **STD.** You or your partner may have a sexually transmitted disease (STD) that you don't know about. All STDs (such as chlamydia, syphilis, and HIV/AIDS) can cause serious problems.

 **Emotional Health.** Get help if you have violence or abuse in your life, high levels of stress, or not enough personal support. Pregnancy can cause money problems or interfere with school or work.

Now That You Have Planned.....

Getting Pregnant. An average woman can become pregnant for a short period of time about 2 weeks before her next period. However, some women can get pregnant at very different times in their menstrual cycles. Talk to your health care provider or clinic about when you are most likely to get pregnant. **Get a pregnancy test** if you think you are pregnant or if you miss your period. Usual signs of pregnancy include sore or enlarged breasts, urinating more often, nausea and tiredness. It's important to get care as early as possible when you are pregnant.

*The best start
for your future baby
begins right now,
before you are pregnant.*

*There are many things
you and your partner
can do to give
your baby the
best possible start.*



PLAN AHEAD

There are many things you need to think about before you get pregnant. What will you need to know, and do, to plan for your pregnancy and parenthood?

You may find it useful to get more information from:

- Family planning services.
- Prepregnancy books at your local library, bookstore or clinic.
- Exercise classes.
- Stop smoking programs.
- Food programs.
- Counseling and mental health centers.
- Religious leaders.
- School counselors and nurses.
- Alcohol/drug treatment programs.
- Medical insurance plans.
- Social services.
- Health department.
- Health care providers: doctors, nurses, clinics and hospitals.

For more information contact:
Your local County Health Department

This information is in the public domain;
duplication is encouraged.

This pamphlet was developed by the State Family Planning Administrators (SFPA) through a grant to The Center for Health Training, Seattle, from the Office of Population Affairs, DHHS. Special thanks to Barb Nechiporenko (Graphics Artist), ND, Olmsted Public Health Services, MN, and others who have developed preconceptional brochures.

Informational materials in alternative formats will be made available upon request.

ADPH-FHS-273/Rev. 3-95/Ed

Before You Get Pregnant.....



Planning is the Key