

Frequently Asked Questions

Prenatal Care

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.

When should I start prenatal care?

As soon as you think you may be pregnant, call your health care professional to set up an appointment. If you need help getting prenatal care, talk with your doctor, nurse, or school counselor. If you do not have the money for prenatal care or a way to get to an office or clinic, there may be groups at schools or in your community that can help you.

What may happen at my first prenatal care visit?

At your first prenatal visit, you will have a conversation with your health care professional. It's important to answer all questions honestly and with as much detail as you can.

You may be asked the date of the first day of your last menstrual period. This date is used to figure out how many weeks pregnant you are and estimate when your baby may be born (your due date). A pregnancy is measured in weeks. A normal pregnancy lasts about 40 weeks.

You may have a complete physical exam, which may include a [pelvic exam](#) . If you have never had a [pelvic exam](#), ask your health care professional to explain it to you. You also may have a urine test and some blood tests. You may be tested for certain [sexually transmitted infections \(STIs\)](#) .

What happens at other prenatal care visits?

As your pregnancy continues, you should visit your health care professional more often. At your visits, you can ask any questions you may have. Your health care professional should check on your health and the health of your [fetus](#) . A pelvic exam is not needed at each visit unless you are having complications.

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 are also 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 parents, family members, or health care staff to teach you, too.

Staying Healthy

What can I do to help ensure a healthy pregnancy?

It's important to eat healthy food, exercise regularly, and get plenty of rest. It's best to avoid things that could harm your pregnancy, such as alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, and illegal drugs. Talk with your health care professional 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 healthy food is good for your health and helps your fetus grow. This is the time to make the healthiest choices possible. Read [Nutrition During Pregnancy](#) to learn more.

[MyPlate](#) is a program that can help you plan a balanced diet. It considers your age, sex, height, weight, and physical activity.

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 I should not eat?

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're pregnant, do not eat bigeye tuna, king mackerel, marlin, orange roughy, shark, swordfish, or tilefish. Limit white (albacore) tuna to only 6 ounces a week. These fish may have high levels of mercury, which can be harmful during pregnancy. All other types of cooked fish are safe and healthy for you and your pregnancy. Try to eat at least two servings of fish or shellfish per week.
- Caffeine—Caffeine is found in coffee, tea, chocolate, energy drinks, and soft drinks. It's a good idea to limit your daily intake of caffeine to less than 200 milligrams, which is the amount in one 12-ounce cup of coffee. Limiting caffeine can help with nausea and sleep problems.
- Sushi—Raw fish may be harmful during pregnancy. Cooked sushi is fine.
- 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 blue cheeses). Hot dogs and lunch meats can also cause this disease, although it's rare. To be on the safe side, only eat hot dogs and lunch meats that have been heated until steaming hot. Read [Listeria and Pregnancy](#) to learn more.

How much weight should I gain during pregnancy?

Weight gain depends on your weight before you were pregnant. If you were underweight, you should gain as much as 40 pounds. If you were a normal weight, you should gain 25 to 35 pounds. If you were overweight or obese, you should gain 11 to 25 pounds.

Your weight may be checked at every prenatal care visit. If you are gaining too much or too little, you may need to make changes to your diet and exercise plan. It depends on how you are doing and how well your fetus is growing.

If you think you have an [eating disorder](#), tell your health care professional. Pregnancy can worsen or expose an eating disorder. Your health care professional can help you find treatment during and after pregnancy.

What vitamins are necessary during pregnancy?

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

How can I get all of the necessary vitamins during pregnancy?

One way to get all the vitamins and minerals you need during pregnancy is to take a multivitamin pill. There are special ones for pregnant women, called prenatal vitamins.

At your first prenatal care visit, tell your health care professional 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 professional can help you decide which vitamin pills to take.

Why is exercise important during pregnancy?

Exercise can help give you more energy, help ease some of the discomforts of pregnancy, and make you stronger for labor and delivery. It's best for teens to exercise 60 minutes or more on most, if not all, days of the week. The 60 minutes do not have to be all at one time. For example, you can do three 20-minute periods of exercise.

If you did not exercise before you were pregnant, start with a few minutes each day and build up slowly. Walking, yoga, and swimming are some of the safest forms of [exercise during pregnancy](#). Before you start any exercise program, talk with your health care professional to make sure it's safe for you.

Is it normal to feel tired during pregnancy?

During early and late pregnancy, it's common to feel very tired. Try to get plenty of rest while you are pregnant. Your body needs 8 to 10 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.

Can I take medications during pregnancy?

Some teens need to take medicine during pregnancy for their health or for the health of the fetus. Tell your health care professional 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 professional before taking any over-the-counter medicines, herbal remedies, vitamins, or minerals.

Most medications do not cause harm during pregnancy. But if a medication you're taking poses a risk, there may be a safer drug you can take while you're pregnant. Do not stop taking a medication prescribed for you until you have talked with your health care professional.

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

Drinking alcohol, smoking or vaping tobacco or marijuana, and using other drugs can harm you and your pregnancy. If you use any of these substances, now is a good time to quit. Vaping (using an e-cigarette or vape pen) is not safer than smoking. All forms of marijuana use are [not recommended during pregnancy](#).

If you want to stop but cannot, talk with your health care professional. They can help you find ways to quit.

Read [Tobacco, Alcohol, Drugs, and Pregnancy](#) for more information.

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 also more likely to go into labor too early. This is called [preterm](#) birth. These risks are even greater for teens who are younger than age 15 or for those who do not get prenatal care.

Teens are also more likely to have STIs. You may have an STI and not know it. Using a latex or polyurethane condom can help prevent getting or spreading STIs. If you think

you may have an STI, it is important to ask to be tested. Read [How to Prevent Sexually Transmitted Infections \(STIs\)](#) to learn more.

Child Care and Support

What may I need help with after the baby is born?

If you are planning to raise your baby yourself, it can help to know what to expect. Your baby will need constant attention. You may not have much time for the things you used to do. You may feel tired, lonely, and frustrated. Preparing for these changes and finding support from other people may make it easier to adjust.

It helps to plan for the costs of raising a baby. You and your baby will need a place to live and money for food, clothing, diapers, and medical care. You may also have other needs, such as a car seat, a stroller, or child care. There are programs that can help with money, food, and other needs, listed in the Resources section below.

Who can I turn to for support?

Your parents may be able to support you and help you. If you feel you cannot tell your parents that you are pregnant, it can be helpful to talk with another adult you trust.

Also think about asking for [help from friends, family, or neighbors](#). Caring for a baby can be very rewarding. It is also a lot of work and responsibility. Make sure you have someone to call on when you need help and when you need some time for yourself. The baby will be a big part of your life now, but you still need to find some time for yourself.

Visit the websites in the Resources section below for more ways to find help.

What about the baby's father?

It's a good idea to learn about the rights and responsibilities of the baby's father. This is important if you want the father involved, and if you do not. There are steps you can take to make the baby's father a legal parent. This can help you request child support payments if needed. You can ask for information about this from a health care professional, a social worker, a family member, or other trusted adult.

I'm afraid for my safety during pregnancy. What should I do?

If you feel that someone may harm you if they find out you are pregnant, or if you want to harm yourself, talk with a health care professional, a school counselor, or another trusted adult. There are also groups in your community that can provide support and help.

If you got pregnant after unwanted sex, talk with your health care professional, school counselor, or other trusted adult. They can get you the help you need.

What if I choose adoption?

In an adoption, a child legally gets new parents. The baby will get a new birth certificate with the new parents' names on it.

You can make arrangements for adoption while you are still pregnant or after the baby is born. If you are interested in adoption, talk with your health care professional or a social worker. Read [Pregnancy Choices: Raising the Baby, Adoption, and Abortion](#) to learn more.

Feeding Your Baby

What are my options for feeding the baby?

Breastfeeding—feeding directly from the breast—works for some moms. For others, feeding a baby pumped breast milk with a bottle is another very good option. Some moms cannot or choose not to breastfeed or pump. They feed their babies formula. Some moms choose a combination of feeding methods.

Talk with your health care professional about which way is best for you. Remember that the decision is a personal one. Feeding your baby should be enjoyable and comfortable for both of you.

What should I know about breastfeeding?

Breastfeeding has a lot of benefits for moms and babies. Breast milk helps the baby resist diseases and allergies. Breastfeeding is also cheaper than bottle-feeding and may help you return to your prepregnancy weight more quickly. Even breastfeeding only for a few weeks or months has health benefits for the baby.

If you breastfeed, don't be surprised if breastfeeding starts off slowly. Some new moms breastfeed without any problems. For others, breastfeeding can be a challenge. Both you and the baby need to learn together and get comfortable. If the baby calms down after breastfeeding, makes urine, and is growing, the baby is getting enough milk. Read [Breastfeeding Your Baby](#) to learn more, and talk with your health care professional if you need help.

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

[\[How to Prepare for Breastfeeding in the Month Before Birth\]](#)

Your Health and Future After Pregnancy

Do I still need to go to the doctor after I have the baby?

Yes. Plan to see your health care professional after you give birth, ideally with multiple visits. These are called postpartum visits, and they help make sure you are healing well. Your health after pregnancy sets the stage for your long-term health.

[\[What to Expect at a Postpartum Checkup—And Why the Visit Matters\]](#)

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

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) recommends having multiple postpartum visits. Ask your health care professional if you can have one visit within the first 3 weeks after your baby is born. Also ask if you can have a full postpartum checkup no later than 12 weeks after birth.

If you have health insurance, check how many postpartum visits your insurance covers. Your parents can help with this if you are on your parents' health insurance.

If you have multiple visits, your first visit can be a quick checkup to make sure you are healing well. In a later visit, you should have a complete exam to be sure you are still in good health.

Postpartum visits are a good time to ask questions about your future health, breastfeeding, birth control, weight loss, sex, or your emotions. To help you remember everything to talk about, write down any questions you have and bring them with you to your visits.

What are my birth control options after having a baby?

There are many options for [birth control](#) after you have a baby, such as pills, the birth control implant, or the [intrauterine device \(IUD\)](#) . Many birth control options can be started right after giving birth.

It can be helpful to decide while you are still pregnant if you will want birth control and which method is right for you. It's possible to get pregnant as soon as 4 weeks after having a baby. You should also use condoms to protect yourself against STIs.

Talk with your health care professional about the best birth control method for you. Read [Postpartum Birth Control](#) to learn more.

Can I still go to school after I have the baby?

Planning for your future also involves finishing school. Finishing your education will help you get a better job, earn more money, and make a better life for you and your baby. You may need help to stay in school.

Ask a counselor about community programs that offer rides to school, child care, or tutoring at home. If you cannot finish high school, you can take classes to prepare for a high school equivalency degree.

Resources and Glossary

Resources

Medicaid

www.medicaid.gov

Each state has its own Medicaid program, which provides low-cost or no-cost health insurance for some people. Contact your state's health department for detailed

information.

Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP)

[\(800\) 318-2596](tel:8003182596)

www.healthcare.gov/medicaid-chip/childrens-health-insurance-program

This program provides low-cost health insurance for children.

U.S. Department of Agriculture Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

www.fns.usda.gov/snap

Apply at your local SNAP office for help paying for food. Your state health department can tell you how to locate this office, or you can go to the website to find your state's SNAP application process.

Women, Infants, and Children Program (WIC)

www.fns.usda.gov/wic

WIC provides help paying for food, information on healthy eating, and referrals to health care.

Contact your WIC state agency to apply. You can find your state agency on the website.

Help Starts Here

www.helpstartshere.org

Find a social worker in your area.

Glossary

Anemia: Abnormally low levels of red blood cells in the bloodstream. Most cases are caused by iron deficiency (lack of iron).

Birth Control: Devices or medications used to prevent pregnancy.

Birth Defects: A physical problem that is present at birth.

Fetus: The stage of human development beyond 8 completed weeks after fertilization.

High Blood Pressure: Blood pressure above the normal level. Also called hypertension.

Intrauterine Device (IUD): A small device that is inserted and left inside the uterus to prevent pregnancy.

Listeriosis: A type of illness you can get from bacteria found in unpasteurized milk, hot dogs, luncheon meats, and smoked seafood.

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

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

Preterm: Less than 37 weeks of pregnancy.

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs): Infections that are spread by sexual contact.

If you have further questions, contact your ob-gyn.

Don't have an ob-gyn? [Learn how to find a doctor near you.](#)

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