

Planning For Pregnancy

While it is a wonderful experience, becoming pregnant is a life-changing event. Pregnancy can be very complicated and approximately one third to one half of pregnancies are not planned or are unexpected. This can potentially lead to complications both while pregnant and after delivery. It is recommended to visit with your doctor about your medical history, family history, nutrition and lifestyle changes that may be necessary. The timing of conception is a common question. Some physicians prefer for patients to stop birth control pills at least three months prior to conception. There is no proven data that this helps prevent miscarriage and should be discussed by you and your doctor.

Your medical history may be one of the most important things to discuss with your doctor. Certain diseases such as diabetes and hypertension may lead to significant complications as the pregnancy progresses. Optimizing your health before conception may significantly reduce the morbidity associated with these diseases. While those are more common, other medical conditions such as Lupus, asthma and thyroid disease are just a few underlying issues that require notice and attention during pregnancy.

While not always considered in your medical history, your past obstetrical history is very important as well. Someone who has had several miscarriages, a second or third trimester fetal loss or an ectopic pregnancy may need to be screened for certain conditions that may help improve the outcomes of future pregnancies. Someone with a history of preterm labor and delivery is at increased risk for recurrence of preterm labor and may need different evaluation and treatment throughout the pregnancy.

Your family history is always important in the assessment of the pregnancy. Patients should always be aware of any medical conditions, inherited diseases or mental retardation in their family. Certain examples may include Down Syndrome, Cystic Fibrosis and blood disorders to name a few.

Your health and nutritional status is most important at the time of conception and the first trimester. Maintaining a balanced healthy diet is always a good start. Obesity may not only reduce your chances of conception but may increase your risks for several pregnancy-related complications. Mild to moderate exercise is generally safe during pregnancy; however, strenuous exercise should be avoided. You should ask your doctor before starting a new exercise program when pregnant as certain things such as heavy lifting should be avoided.

While trying to conceive, it is very important to take a daily prenatal vitamin. All prenatal vitamins provide the recommended 400 micrograms of folic acid known to help prevent neural tube defects. Some recommendations are to take up to 800 micrograms a day and the dose should be higher in multiple gestations and those with a history of children with neural tube defects. All immunizations should be current prior to conception.

Smoking, alcohol and drug use should always be discontinued prior to conception. Smoking is known to increase the risk of growth restriction, placental abruption, preterm labor and several other complications of pregnancy. Alcohol use is known to cause several neurological and

physical abnormalities and all illicit drugs are unsafe while pregnant. Caffeine intake over 250 mg daily may decrease the rate of fertility while over 500 mg daily may increase the risk of miscarriage.

Any medications you are taking should be reviewed with your doctor prior to conception. There are some prescription medications that may cause serious pregnancy-related complications.

In conclusion, it is best to visit with your doctor about becoming pregnant. Many things can be done to help achieve the goal of a healthy baby and healthy mother.