



# Is a pregnancy in your future someday?

Planning ahead to have a baby is best. But half of all pregnancies are unplanned or mistimed. So how prepared are you? There are things you can do to improve your health, and be better prepared for pregnancy when the time is right.

## Do you take folic acid (0.4mg) every day?

We recommend that all women of childbearing age take folic acid (400 micrograms or 0.4mg) every day, whether or not they are planning to become pregnant. The easiest way to do this is with a standard multi-vitamin. Studies show that folic acid plays an important role in lowering the risk for certain birth defects (called neural tube defects), if taken before conception and through the first three months of pregnancy.

- Also, try to eat foods that contain folic acid, such as:
- dark green leafy vegetables (spinach, broccoli, asparagus)
  - citrus fruits (strawberries, oranges, and orange juice)
  - whole grain breads and cereals
  - legumes (beans, peas)
  - fortified breakfast cereals

If you have had a previous pregnancy that involved a neural tube defect, you will need even more folic acid. Talk with your doctor or other health care professional before trying to get pregnant.

## Do you smoke?

- One of the most important things you can do to improve your health is quit smoking now.
- Smoking may make it harder for you to get pregnant.
  - Women who smoke are more likely to have problems in pregnancy and childbirth.

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Kaiser Permanente wants to give you the information you need to help you be even healthier in case you become pregnant. Thinking now about how you can prepare your body can help.

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## Do you smoke?

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- Smokers tend to have premature and smaller (underdeveloped) babies who have problems after birth and throughout life.
- The risk of SIDS (crib death) increases if a mother smokes during pregnancy.
- Children in smoking households have four times as many respiratory infections (lung, sinus, and ear infections) as those in nonsmoking households.

Talk with your doctor or other health care professional or visit your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or department if you would like information on quitting smoking. Encourage your partner or other family members to quit smoking with you. It is easier not to smoke when you are surrounded by other nonsmokers.

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## Do you drink alcohol or use recreational drugs?

We understand that it may be hard to stop using recreational drugs or alcohol. If you or someone in your family has a problem with drugs or alcohol, call your health care professional. They can help. If you drink alcohol or use drugs like cocaine and crack during pregnancy, you can harm your baby.

- Alcohol and drugs can cause your new baby to cry more than normal or have problems eating, sleeping, or breathing. Later, your baby might have trouble learning.
- They can cause more serious problems like birth defects or brain damage. They can even cause you to lose your pregnancy.

Take the time before you get pregnant to stop using drugs or alcohol. Kaiser Permanente has programs that can help you quit. For more information, talk with your doctor or other health care professional.

## Are you exposed to toxic substances or radiation?

Being around certain chemicals that are found in the home or workplace could make it more difficult to become pregnant and may harm your developing baby.

Try to:

- follow safety recommendations for use of toxic chemical products (solvents, pesticides, cleaners, paint thinners).
- avoid contact with products containing lead or mercury (see the healthy eating section, next page).

To lessen contact with chemicals, wear rubber gloves and work in a well-ventilated area. If you have concerns or questions about the possible effects of exposure to chemicals or other toxic substances, please contact your doctor or other health care professional.



## Has your partner ever hurt, hit, or threatened you, or made you afraid?

When someone attacks you with words, objects, hands, or fists, that is abuse. Abuse usually happens when one person tries to control another person. It is important to know that if someone has hurt you before, it may happen again. Sometimes abuse starts when you become pregnant. Abuse during pregnancy can cause health problems for you and your baby.

- Women who are abused while they are pregnant have lower weight gain and more anemia, infections, and bleeding.
- Babies born to abused women have a higher risk of low birth weight, premature birth, and death.

If you need to talk—or if you need help—contact your doctor or other health care professional. Or, you can call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE (1-800-799-7233) 24 hours a day. The National Domestic Violence Hotline can give you information about local resources. For more information, visit [kp.org/domesticviolence](http://kp.org/domesticviolence).

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## Do you eat a variety of healthy foods each day?

Eating a variety of healthy foods each day and trying to reach or maintain a healthy weight are important for good health.

- Eat a variety of whole grains, fruits, and vegetables daily.
- Cut down on fats like butter, margarine, sauces, gravies, mayonnaise, salad dressing, sour cream, baked goods or pastries, cookies, and crackers.
- Choose lean meats and poultry (chicken or turkey without skin).
- Don't eat large fish, such as shark, swordfish, tilefish, and king mackerel, because they contain high levels of mercury. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration advises that women of child bearing age, pregnant women, nursing mothers, and young children can safely eat 12 ounces of cooked fish per week. You can eat shellfish, canned fish (less than 6 ounces of tuna per week), smaller ocean fish, or farm-raised fish.



- For snacks, choose fresh fruit, raw vegetables, yogurt, or popcorn (without butter) instead of high calorie foods like chips, candy, or soda.
- Drink eight to ten 8-ounce glasses of fluid daily. This includes water, milk, and clear (non-creamy) soup.
- Recent studies have linked caffeine use to an increased risk of miscarriage. We recommend that you limit caffeine to help ensure a healthy pregnancy. Try switching to decaffeinated beverages. If you do use caffeine, limit it to one cup of coffee or two cups of tea a day. Remember that many regular sodas contain caffeine. They also contain the same amount of sugar as a candy bar. If you choose soda, consider switching to the caffeine-free and sugar-free varieties or juice with sparkling water.

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## Are you at a healthy weight?

It's important to try to reach a healthy weight before you start your family. Underweight women may have a harder time getting pregnant and are more likely to have smaller (underdeveloped) babies that have problems during labor and after birth. Women who are overweight may experience high blood pressure or diabetes during pregnancy. Compared to other pregnant women, women who are overweight are also at increased risk for a cesarean section delivery and may take longer to recover. Babies born to overweight women also have a higher risk of some birth defects such as heart defects and neural tube defects. Losing excess weight before pregnancy can reduce this risk. For more information on weight management, talk with your doctor or other health care professional or visit your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or department.



### Are you physically active on most days?

If you are physically active on a regular basis now, great! If not, this is a good time to start. You will feel better overall, have more energy and less stress, and sleep better. Try to develop a regular and moderate exercise program that you can continue during pregnancy. It is important to begin slowly and build up gradually. A 5- or 10-minute walk is a good start. Try to set a goal of exercising at least 30 minutes per day on most days. If you have a health condition, check with your doctor or other health care professional before you begin any exercise program.

### Do you have regular GYN exams?

We recommend that women have regular Pap tests, pelvic exams, and breast exams. All sexually active women 25 and under should also be screened every year for chlamydia (a sexually transmitted disease). If you have any unusual bleeding, pain, sores, or bumps near your vagina, contact your doctor or other health care professional. It is better to identify any health problems or STDs right away when they may be easier to treat.

### Are you using an effective method of birth control?

Birth control is another very good way to protect your health. When you choose a birth control method, it is important to decide how long you want to wait before you become pregnant. If you don't want to get pregnant

very soon, or have been advised not to get pregnant, you should choose a very effective form of birth control. These include:

- IUD (intrauterine contraceptive device or system)
- Three-month injectable
- Contraceptive implant
- Vaginal ring
- Birth control patch
- Birth control pills

So-called "barrier methods" of birth control, such as diaphragms, cervical caps, and condoms with spermicide are not as effective at preventing pregnancy. Plus, they must be used at the time of intercourse. It is also a good idea to have some emergency contraceptive pills or ECPs at home in case you have unexpected unprotected sex. For more information about birth control options, talk with your doctor or other health care professional or visit your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or department.

### Have you been tested for sexually transmitted diseases?

Diseases that are transmitted through sexual contact not only affect your ability to get pregnant, but they also can infect and harm your baby.

- Examples of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are chlamydia, gonorrhea, genital herpes, HIV (the virus that causes AIDS), and syphilis.
- You can have an STD even if you don't have symptoms.
- STD symptoms can include sores, bumps, or blisters near your vagina, rectum, or mouth and burning or pain when you urinate (pee).
- If you have any of these symptoms, you should avoid having sex until you see a health care professional.
- If you think you may have an STD, or you're not sure of the sexual history of your partner, contact your doctor or other health care professional to arrange for an exam and testing before you get pregnant.



## Do you have any medical conditions or are you taking any medications on a regular basis?

If you are managing an ongoing condition such as diabetes, high blood pressure, a seizure disorder, depression, or any other kind of chronic illness, it is very important to talk to your doctor before you get pregnant. Likewise, if you take any prescription, over-the-counter medications, or herbal remedies on a regular basis, you may be at higher risk of having a problem pregnancy. In either case, please talk with your doctor or other health care professional before planning a pregnancy. Changing your treatment plan or medication and making sure your condition is under good control may make the difference in being sure you and your baby are healthy. If you are not planning a pregnancy soon and you have an ongoing condition, be sure to use a highly effective type of birth control.

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## Are you immune to rubella, chickenpox, hepatitis, and pertussis (whooping cough)?

Some infections can be prevented by immunization (shots). Before you plan to get pregnant, ask your doctor or other health care professional if you should be immunized against rubella (German measles), chickenpox (varicella), hepatitis, and whooping cough (pertussis). If you are not immune, you may want to receive the vaccinations before you get pregnant. Being exposed to these infections during early pregnancy could cause harm to your baby. We recommend that you wait at least one month after being vaccinated before trying to get pregnant.

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## Do you have a family history of birth defects?

Genetic screening tests can help find out if you may have a higher chance of having a baby with certain genetic or inherited conditions. Many factors, such as your age and health, your family's history, and your ethnic

background can influence the chance of having a baby with certain genetic or inherited conditions. If you or the father of your baby—or any close family members (children, parents, sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles)—have a history of birth defects or inherited conditions, you may have a higher chance of having a baby with such a condition. A genetic counselor can give you more information about the specific risks to your baby and possible tests you may choose to have. Getting your test results before you get pregnant will give you time to consider your options. Please contact the Genetics Department to arrange for a consultation.



## Other Resources

- Visit the state of California website on preparing for pregnancy at [everywomancalifornia.org](http://everywomancalifornia.org)
- Connect to our Web site at [kp.org](http://kp.org) and click on Live Healthy under the “Health and wellness” tab.
- To learn more about genetic screening tests visit our Genetics Web site at [genetics.kp.org](http://genetics.kp.org)
- Contact the Health Education Center or department, located in many of our medical centers, to receive more information on nutrition, planning for pregnancy, and many other topics.