

Preparing for pregnancy



When you thrive, your baby thrives

Your body will nurture your baby throughout your pregnancy, so everything you do to stay healthy will also help your baby's healthy development. You can't control everything, of course, but you may be surprised at all of the healthy choices that are in your control.

Making healthy lifestyle changes

Some lifestyle changes may be easy to make. Some may be harder, but the harder changes may also be the adjustments that make the biggest difference in your health and your baby's health.

Healthcare

One of the most important things you can do for yourself is find a good healthcare provider for the duration of your pregnancy. What are some of the things that you should expect from a good provider?

- Go over your complete medical history, including family history, to see if there are any conditions that need to be monitored or treated for a safer pregnancy
- Options to receive prenatal vitamins, even if you have a healthy diet
- Get a physical exam, including a pelvic exam, urine sample, blood work and an ultrasound
- If you're anxious, worried or feeling overwhelmed, please share this with your provider. These are natural feelings, and your healthcare provider may have suggestions for helping you cope with these emotions.

Nutrition¹

Even if you eat healthy now, there may be better choices you can make when you're pregnant. You may need to consume more calories, but you want to make sure the additional calories are healthy and nutritious.

Here are some examples of foods which could be great for you and your baby:

- Calcium-rich foods (also a good source of iodine)
- Dark leafy greens
- Foods high in fiber
- Foods high in vitamin A, such as carrots, pumpkins, sweet potatoes, spinach, water squash, turnip greens, beet greens, apricots and cantaloupe
- Foods high in vitamin C, such as oranges, grapefruits, strawberries, honeydew, papaya, broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, green peppers, tomatoes and mustard greens
- Foods that are a good source of folates, such as dark green leafy vegetables and legumes like lima beans, black beans, black-eyed peas and chickpeas
- Iron-rich foods

Exercise²

Maintaining a regular exercise routine throughout your pregnancy may help with maintaining a healthy weight and may help decrease common discomforts of pregnancy, including backaches and fatigue. Physical activity can also help relieve stress. There is also some evidence that exercise can prevent gestational diabetes (diabetes that develops during pregnancy).

Always check with your healthcare provider before starting or increasing your exercise program. Your doctor may advise you not to exercise if you have conditions like bleeding or spotting, a weak cervix or a history of early labor.

Drinking, smoking and drugs³

When you're pregnant, everything that goes through your adult systems also goes through your baby's developing organs. Exhaustive research has shown the harmful effects on your baby's development if you drink, smoke or take drugs, including prescription drugs that your doctor has not cleared as safe for your unborn child.

Even if you consider yourself a casual user of any of these substances, they can be dangerous to your unborn child, causing premature birth, birth defects and even death. The only safe choice for these substances is to stop completely — before, during and after your pregnancy.

Environmental contaminants

When you're pregnant, substances that may not harm you as an adult can be toxic to your unborn child. Avoid working with or handling things like:

- Garden products, such as fertilizers
- Insecticides
- Cat feces (let someone else clean out the litter box)
- Cleaning products and hair dyes with ammonia and chlorine
- Lead

Weight

There's no ideal weight for your pregnancy, but there are general guidelines and weight ranges that will give you an idea of what is normally healthy or unhealthy. Being either underweight or overweight can create problems during your pregnancy. It's important to manage your weight throughout your pregnancy and maintain a healthy weight even as your pregnancy progresses.

Sources:

1. Department of Health and Human Services Office on Women's Health. Pregnancy and Nutrition, January 12, 2021. Available from [medlineplus.gov](https://www.medicinesplus.gov).
2. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. Physical Activity and Exercise during Pregnancy and the Postpartum Period, March 2022. Available from www.acog.org.
3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Substance Use during Pregnancy, May 23, 2022. Available from www.cdc.gov.

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