

PLaN Planning for a Healthy Pregnancy

December 2023

Lifestyle

Before you fall pregnant it is important to be as healthy as you can be. A healthy body and lifestyle mean a healthier start for your baby and can optimise your pregnancy outcome. The following are recommendations to consider before you try and may even help you fall pregnant.

- Healthy diet – a well-balanced diet is important before, during and after your pregnancy. Note that certain foods should be avoided and good hygiene observed during food preparation when pregnant
- Exercise – developing a regular exercise program before you fall pregnant means you will be more likely to continue. Exercise has positive benefits on your physical and mental health
- Healthy weight (recommended BMI range is 18.5 -25). A BMI greater than 30 may increase risk of complications for you and your baby
- Quit smoking and vaping
- Consider your alcohol intake: no alcohol is recommended during pregnancy
- Recreational drugs – giving these up before you fall pregnant gives your baby the best start to life
- Caffeine – present in coffee, tea, cola, chocolate & energy drinks. Reduce daily intake to less than 200mg (equivalent to 1 to 2 espresso coffees)

Vitamin and mineral supplements

There are many vitamin and mineral preparations specifically designed for pregnancy and breastfeeding. In particular, it is important you take

0.5mg folic acid from at least 1 month **before** you fall pregnant as much of baby's development is in the first few weeks when you may not even know you are pregnant. This can help prevent the birth defect spina bifida. Some women particularly those with diabetes, on specific medications or who are overweight, require a higher dose of folic acid (5mg): please check this with your doctor.

Due to widespread iodine deficiency in Australia, iodine supplementation is also recommended before and throughout pregnancy to help promote appropriate brain development. The recommended dose is 150mcg per day.

A well-balanced diet can provide you with most of the nutrients needed prior to and during pregnancy. Supplementation may be required for iron, vitamin B12, vitamin D and calcium if you are at specific risk of deficiency - you can check if you need these supplements with your doctor.

Medications

Certain medicines prescribed by your doctor or bought in a pharmacy or supermarket may not be safe while you are pregnant. We suggest you make a list of all your regular medications and find out the safety of these from your doctor or call MotherSafe before you fall pregnant. In making this list you should include all prescription medications as well as those you have bought online, bought from a pharmacy, supermarket and health food store or have been recommended by a naturopath.

Some herbal medicines, traditional medicines, homeopathy products and nutritional supplements may be harmful to you and your developing baby. It is important to check these before you fall pregnant.

While some medications are not considered safe when planning or during pregnancy, other medications are important to continue, to ensure you stay in good health for the pregnancy. This is of benefit to you and your baby.

Immunisation and blood tests

You should know your vaccination status and immunity when you are planning a pregnancy. A blood test can show whether you have had immunisations and are immune to certain infections that otherwise could be harmful to a pregnancy.

Confirm that you (and your partner) are immune to **rubella** (German measles) and **varicella** (chickenpox).

If you had the full course of the varicella vaccine, you do not need to have a blood test to confirm immunity. This is because immunity following vaccination is often not detectable using currently available blood tests. **You must wait 1 month before trying to get pregnant after receiving chickenpox and rubella vaccinations.**

The influenza vaccine and whooping cough (pertussis) vaccine are now given during pregnancy rather than before pregnancy. However, if you are planning to be pregnant, it is reasonable to have the flu vaccine if it is available (seasonal) and also consider COVID vaccination.

Your doctor would also like to check your general health before you fall pregnant, so other tests can be arranged including:

- Thyroid function tests
- Testing for diabetes
- HIV, Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C
- Screening for sexually transmitted infections
- Full blood count (for iron and thalassaemia screening) and blood group

Knowing this information in advance may help you sort out any problems before you fall pregnant.

Medical history

Your medical history is also important to consider when planning a pregnancy. Discuss with your doctor your medical history, in particular any of the following:

- Heart conditions
- Asthma/Respiratory Illness
- Endocrine/Hormone problems (including diabetes or thyroid problems) and obesity
- Autoimmune disorders
- Migraine /Neurological problems (e.g. epilepsy)
- Kidney problems
- Mental illness (depression, eating disorders, anxiety, schizophrenia)
- Blood problems (bleeding or clotting problems)
- Gynaecological problems

Health check-ups

It is important to know that your general health is good before you fall pregnant. Even if you have no other medical conditions, it is still important to have the following health checks up to date before falling pregnant:

- Blood Pressure
- Women's health check-up – including cervical screening test if due
- Dental check-up and skin check

Family history

Knowing about the general medical history of your family (both sides) can be beneficial when planning a pregnancy.

If you know you have a family history of a genetic disorder such as cystic fibrosis or muscular dystrophy, genetic testing may be available. It may take some time to obtain results from genetic tests, so allow yourself plenty of time to get results and information while you are planning your pregnancy. Spending a little time while planning may save a lot of stress once you are pregnant.

It is also important to find out if there are any of the following problems specifically to do with pregnancy and reproduction in your family:

- Birth defects
- Fetal abnormalities
- Developmental delay/learning problems
- Miscarriage or stillbirth
- Pregnancy complications
- Complicated labours

If you ticked any of the above, you should discuss this with your doctor before you fall pregnant and you may be referred for genetic counselling or to other specialists for further discussion.

Reproductive carrier screening

It is recommended that all couples planning a pregnancy discuss with their doctor reproductive carrier screening for recessive genetic conditions such as cystic fibrosis. Having this information before you are pregnant can help you make more choices about family planning. There are several different reproductive carrier testing options available, and some are now covered by Medicare. Your doctor can order these tests for you.

Social situation and mental health

Trying to fall pregnant and pregnancy itself can affect your emotional wellbeing. Ensure you have some people and a doctor or psychologist you feel comfortable talking to so you can discuss anything bothering you. You can let them know if things begin to feel overwhelming.

Have you considered the following issues?

Family & relationships

- Do you already have children?
- Have you and your partner discussed having children and do you feel ready to start planning a pregnancy?
- Have you started trying to fall pregnant?
- Do you feel you have a good social support network (friends and family)?

Work, study & financial commitments

- Is your work/study environment suitable for pregnancy and return to work/study after your baby?
- Do you work? Does your partner work? Are you studying?
- Have you considered childcare options?

Mental health & wellbeing

- Do you or your partner have a history of anxiety and depression? It's important to seek help & manage it well prior to falling pregnant. Talk to your GP regarding management options.

Finally - it can take couples a while to fall pregnant. Relax and enjoy the time with your partner, knowing you have done everything you can to prepare for a healthy pregnancy. Good luck.

For information about PLaN Clinics- see the **Planning Pregnancy** section of the **MotherSafe website** [Pregnancy Planning, Lifestyle and Nutrition \(PLaN\) | South Eastern Sydney Local Health District \(nsw.gov.au\)](https://www.seslhd.health.nsw.gov.au/royal-hospital-for-women)

Further information regarding vaccination, smoking, diet and exercise, obesity and vitamin and minerals during pregnancy can be viewed in the factsheets on the MotherSafe website.

References

General pregnancy references & information sources

- Royal Hospital for Women Sydney <https://www.seslhd.health.nsw.gov.au/royal-hospital-for-women> Ph: (02) 9382 6111
- MotherSafe: <https://www.seslhd.health.nsw.gov.au/royal-hospital-for-women/servicesclinics/directory/mothersafe> Ph: Sydney Metro (02) 9382 6539 NSW non-metro 1800 647 848
- MotherToBaby: www.mothersatobaby.org
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention –Before pregnancy: <https://www.cdc.gov/preconception/index.html>
- Australian Government Department of Health: Immunisation for pregnancy <https://www.health.gov.au/healthtopics/immunisation/immunisation-throughout-life/immunisation-for-pregnancy> National immunisation information line Ph: 1800671811
- NSW Genetics Education: <http://www.genetics.edu.au/>
- NSW Health: <https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/factsheets/Pages/default.aspx>
- Depression/Anxiety: www.beyondblue.org.au Ph: 1300 224 636
- Mood Disorders: Black Dog Institute: <http://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/>

Quit smoking resources

QUIT Program <https://www.quit.org.au/> Ph: 137 848

Alcohol and drug information service

Alcohol Drug Information Service NSW www.yourroom.com.au Ph: 1800250015

Alcohol guidelines

Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care: [Australian Alcohol Guidelines revised | Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care](https://www.health.gov.au/healthtopics/immunisation/immunisation-throughout-life/immunisation-for-pregnancy)
Royal Hospital for Women Melbourne: Alcohol and pregnancy [Alcohol | The Royal Women's Hospital \(thewomens.org.au\)](https://www.health.gov.au/healthtopics/immunisation/immunisation-throughout-life/immunisation-for-pregnancy)

Nutrition & food safety

NSW Food Authority: [Pregnancy | NSW Food Authority](https://www.health.gov.au/healthtopics/immunisation/immunisation-throughout-life/immunisation-for-pregnancy)

Food Standards Australia New Zealand FSANZ:

<https://www.foodstandards.gov.au/consumer/nutrition/pregnancy/pregnancy-and-healthy-eating>

Genetic counselling and reproductive carrier screening

Genetic counselling services NSW

<https://www.genetics.edu.au/SitePages/Genetic-Services-listing-NSW.aspx>

Centre for Genetics Education

www.genetics.edu.au/PDF/Reproductive_carrier_screening_fact_sheet-CGE.pdf

Social support

Family planning: www.fpnsw.org.au Ph: 1300 658 886

Domestic Violence Line: Ph: 1800 656 463

Telephone Interpreter Service: <https://www.tisnational.gov.au/>

Ph:13 14 50

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Should you wish to discuss any aspect of this information please send an email to RHWfeedback@sesiahs.health.nsw.gov.au