



Preparing for Pregnancy

HEALTHY DIET

A good healthy diet will include fruit and vegetables each day, and good quality protein, such as in lean meat, fish, eggs, pulses (e.g. beans, lentils). You also need to consume complex carbohydrates, wholegrains, plenty of calcium (preferably in the form of low fat dairy products). It is best to avoid excessive additives such as colours, flavours and preservatives. Attempt to keep to a relatively low fat diet, and to include mainly healthy fats such as olive oil. Fish oil supplements can be good for fertility and in pregnancy and may reduce risk of post natal depression.

When you are pregnant, remember to avoid eating food that could contain Listeria. Listeria can cause serious problems for the unborn child. Such foods include soft cheese such as feta, pate, cold meats, pre-prepared salads and raw or smoked seafood. You will also need to be careful to limit amounts of fish known to have high levels of mercury (swordfish, marlin, shark/flake, orange roughy and catfish).

NOT GETTING PREGNANT?

Women aged 35 or over, shouldn't try too long before getting expert advice about fertility. Repromed suggests that you seek advice if you have not been successful after 6 months. Women under 35 should seek advice if they have menstrual problems or are not pregnant after 12 months of trying.



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Many factors influence fertility and if you're planning a pregnancy it's best that you prepare yourself. Outlined below are some of the things you might like to consider. Some will help you in reaching your goal of pregnancy and others are preventative measures to ensure the health and safety of your baby.

Visit your GP for a general health check including Pap smear, breast check, blood pressure, weight, screening blood tests and lifestyle advice. Book a long appointment and your GP will spend the time you need to check these issues in detail.

FOLATE

Folate supplementation is recommended at least 1 month prior to pregnancy and for 3 months into the pregnancy as this reduces the chance of the baby having a defect in the neural tube, such as spina bifida. Folate can be taken alone or in combination with other pre-pregnancy supplements. More information about folate can be obtained from http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/_srcfiles/FSANZ%20Folic%20Acid.pdf

RUBELLA

A blood test can show if you are immune to rubella. If not, immunisation will be recommended. Similarly it is recommended that women preparing for pregnancy have a blood test to check their immunity to varicella. If you are not immune, you can be immunised to reduce the risk of infection in pregnancy.

WEIGHT

Weight issues are important for both men and women when considering fertility. If you are overweight, your body mass index (BMI) will be > 25. The BMI is calculated by measuring your body weight in kilograms and your height in metres and applying these to the formulae $BMI = \text{body wt} / (\text{height})^2$. If your BMI is over 25, aim to be on a downward trend. The closer to BMI 25, the better, and remember ANY weight loss in this situation will improve your fertility. See a dietitian for expert individualised advice.

Some diets that are safe in pregnancy include "The Low GI Diet " <http://www.hha.com.au/books/0733618499.html> by Jennie Brand Miller (with a simple to follow 12 week plan) – or the CSIRO Diet.

Rapid or extreme weight loss is not good for your fertility but may be alright for a quick "kickstart" before you start trying for pregnancy.

Women who are underweight (BMI < 20) are also at risk of reduced fertility. If you are underweight and your period cycles are long or irregular, a small weight gain may be beneficial, or cut back on strenuous exercise

SMOKING

Smoking is hazardous to your fertility, your general health and your baby. QUIT NOW. There are many quit methods available including patches, gum, medications. Visit the QuitSA website for further information on pregnancy related programmes http://www.quitsa.org.au/asp/smile_free_pregnancy_project.aspx

ALCOHOL

Women must stop all alcohol while trying to conceive and during pregnancy, while men should aim to keep to current "safe drinking guidelines" – average 2 drinks/day maximum, with several alcohol free days each week and no more than 4 standard drinks in one session.

FITNESS

You will benefit from being fit prior to pregnancy. For women who are unfit, developing at least a moderate level of fitness is advisable. Perhaps build up to 45 minutes brisk walking 5 days per week. If you are very unfit, start with 10 minutes twice a week at a moderate pace, and each week increase the time and frequency of your exercise. It is best to limit intense or high impact exercise, and no more than 4 hours high intensity exercise per week is recommended.

Men should also aspire to a reasonable level of fitness.

CAFFEINE

Both men and women need to aim for <200mg of caffeine a day, which equals a maximum of 1-2 coffees or glasses Cola/energy drinks, or 2-3 teas, and not too much chocolate either! If you need to cut down, do so slowly to reduce the impact of withdrawal symptoms.

HEAT

It is best to avoid excessive heat from saunas or spas when trying to conceive and during pregnancy. Men should also avoid situations where their scrotal area is unable to keep cooler than the rest of the body. Keep laptops on the desk and off the lap!

FERTILITY AND PHASES OF THE MENSTRUAL CYCLE

A normal menstrual cycle may result in changes in body temperature that can indicate if ovulation has occurred. However, such charts also have disadvantages as they are not able to predict ovulation, and many things affect temperature. However there is a reliable progesterone blood test that can be used to confirm ovulation. There are urine Ovulation Predictor Kits that can be helpful if they work, but not all women get enough hormone entering the urine to get a positive reading. Saliva kits can be difficult to interpret, in which case may cause further stress or confusion. Simple maths is often very helpful. Record your longest and shortest menstrual cycle. The potential fertile time starts 16 days before the end of your shortest cycle and ends 12 days before the end of your longest cycle.

PAP SMEAR

Be sure to update your smear test if it is nearly due. It is better to have one a bit early than be due in the middle of a pregnancy and find out that you have an abnormality on your smear that needs attention.