

Wellbeing in Pregnancy

We are becoming more aware of the importance of the general wellbeing of both parents at the time of conceiving a pregnancy, and throughout your pregnancy. We have therefore put together a checklist of things to consider when you are planning a pregnancy, and during the first few months. Your Obstetrician is always happy to discuss these issues further.

Nutrition

Growing a baby takes a lot of nutrition, and a balanced diet at the time of conceiving gives your little one the best chance of growing well. Recommendations are for a balanced diet, including fruit and vegetables, wholegrain carbohydrates, adequate calcium intake, balanced protein sources every day, and iron rich foods. If you use added salt, please choose an iodised version.

There is a small amount of evidence which shows an association between high caffeine intake and miscarriage or difficulty conceiving, but it is not very strong. You could consider limiting your caffeine intake to less than 200mcg (1-2 cups of coffee) daily when you are trying to conceive.

We recommend the following websites for balanced information about healthy eating for everyone:

<http://www.nutritionaustralia.org/>

<http://lean-green-and-healthy.blogspot.com.au/>

For specific information about eating before and during pregnancy:

<http://theconversation.com/eating-well-before-pregnancy-linked-to-lower-birth-defect-risk-3687>

<https://www.rcog.org.uk/globalassets/documents/patients/patient-information-leaflets/pregnancy/pi-healthy-eating-and-vitamin-supplements-in-pregnancy.pdf>

Pregnancy supplements

There are many pregnancy supplements available in Australia, which are mostly of excellent quality. For people who follow a balanced diet the only supplements required are 400mcg of folate and 150mcg iodine daily, preferably for at least one month prior to conception and for the first 3 months of pregnancy.

Women in the following groups are advised to take a higher dose of folate (1.5-2mg/day):

- A personal history (self or past pregnancy) of neural tube defect (NTD)
- A first degree relative with a pregnancy with a NTD
- Use of sodium valproate
- Body mass index greater than 30 kg/m²
- Diabetes mellitus (type 1 or type 2) women are advised to take 5mg of folate daily (high dose).

Some sources have recommended a vitamin D supplement as well, particularly for those at risk of deficiency (people who are dark skinned, veiled, see limited sunlight or have proven vitamin D deficiency). If you choose a vitamin D supplement, we recommend 1000iu cholecalciferol (D3) per day, or if you are deficient, discuss the dose with your doctor.

Lifestyle & exercise

Light to moderate exercise is recommended for all couples as part of a healthy lifestyle. The Australian recommendations are for 30 minutes of exercise most days for all adults aged 18 – 64. Vigorous exercise is recommended for couples who are overweight and obese, but for normal weight women this may increase the time until conception.

For further reading:

<http://www.fertilitysociety.com.au/wp-content/uploads/FSA-The-role-of-exercise-in-improving-fertility-2016.pdf>

<http://www.racgp.org.au/download/Documents/AFP/2014/August/201408Lewis.pdf>

Weight management

Women who are either underweight or overweight and obese during pregnancy have higher risks of many pregnancy complications. The ideal weight range to conceive is a body mass index of 18.5 – 24.9. Even small lifestyle change and modest weight management can really help increase your chance of having a healthy pregnancy.

Some women find that pregnancy is a challenging time for their body image and general wellbeing. If you find the changes in your body confronting, please discuss this with your obstetrician who may refer you to a dietician or psychologist to help manage these issues in a healthy way.

Further Reading:

<http://yourfertility.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/LiveLighter-fact-sheet.pdf>

<http://bodyimagemovement.com.au/>

Smoking

There is no known safe level of smoking during pregnancy for either parent. If you or your partner are current smokers you should consider reducing or quitting when trying to conceive as smoking increases the chance of infertility, miscarriage, low birth weight, other pregnancy complications and sudden infant death syndrome.

Further Reading:

<http://www.quit.org.au/>

Alcohol

Alcohol is known to increase the chance of birth defects, and often the damage can occur before you have discovered that you are pregnant. Excess alcohol intake for men can also cause reduced fertility. Those who binge drink are most at risk. It is unclear what effect low to moderate levels of alcohol have on a pregnancy, but the national health and medical research council of Australia have recommended that women who are pregnant or trying to conceive avoid alcohol. If you currently enjoy the occasional alcoholic beverage you could consider limiting it to the first two weeks of your menstrual cycle whilst trying to conceive.

Further Reading:

<https://drinkwise.org.au>

Recreational Drugs

Recreational drugs should be avoided when you are trying to conceive and during pregnancy as some substances cause pregnancy complications, and are often contaminated with other substances which can be potentially dangerous for you and your fetus.

Medications, Herbs and Supplements

If you are using medications or herbal supplements you should always check if they are safe for conception and pregnancy with your doctor before taking them. You may need to change to alternative medications prior to becoming pregnant. The SA Pharmacy Obstetric and Paediatric Medicines Information Service is located at the Women's and Children's Hospital. A pharmacist can advise you if a particular prescription or non-prescription medicine is safe while you are pregnant or breastfeeding. You can contact the service Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm on 08 8161 7222.

Further information:

<http://www.mothersafe.org.au/>

Complementary and alternative medicines

Please discuss any complementary or alternative medicines you are using with your obstetrician or gynaecologist so we can work together to maximise your wellbeing.

Screening tests & immunisations

The following tests are recommended for women who are intending to become pregnant:

- Full blood count
- Blood group and antibody screen
- Syphilis, Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C, HIV and Rubella antibody tests
- Pap smear +/- sexually transmitted infection screen

These are performed prior to pregnancy if possible so immunisation against rubella or treatment of abnormalities can occur prior to pregnancy.

Many vaccinations are safe in pregnancy, but always tell your doctor before having an immunisation if you might be pregnant already. We recommend flu vaccination for all women hoping to conceive or already pregnant as influenza can be a very severe illness during your pregnancy.

Whooping cough vaccination is recommended for all women between 28 – 32 weeks pregnant in order to provide passive immunity to your baby prior to their first vaccines at 6-8 weeks of age.

Medical conditions

Medical conditions such as heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, epilepsy, mental ill-health, hormonal and autoimmune conditions can have a significant impact on your pregnancy. Ideally we should optimise the management of these conditions before you become pregnant, often in conjunction with your GP and physician. If you are already pregnant and have underlying health problems, please make an appointment with your GP or obstetrician as soon as possible.

Genetic conditions

Some families have health conditions that can be inherited by the next generation. If you wish to reduce the chance of your children inheriting some conditions either pre-implantation genetic diagnosis using an IVF process, or early pregnancy genetic screening can be offered. Your obstetrician will discuss some of these issues with you and may offer genetic counselling, or carrier screening prior to you conceiving.

Dental health

We recommend a dental check up in the pregnancy planning phase as there is an association between dental disease, prematurity and low birth weight. The hormonal changes of pregnancy can affect dental and gum health.

For further reading:

<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/pregnancy-and-teeth>

Insurance & financial planning

To be cared for by our obstetric group practice private health insurance will be required. There are taxation advantages for some families with holding private health cover. Most insurance companies have waiting periods which apply to obstetric cover. It is also important that you assess if your baby will be covered by your policy, and whether changing to a family policy may be to your benefit.

The Medicare safety net can assist in reducing your out of pocket costs, which you need to register for with Medicare. You may also wish to assess your family budget and work out how expanding your family may impact on your finances.

Further information:

<https://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/medicare/medicare-safety-net>

<http://www.privatehealth.gov.au/>

<https://www.moneysmart.gov.au/>

Paid Parental Leave

Your current employer may have parental leave options, and the Australian Government offers paid parental leave to some families. It is useful to register before the birth of your baby to minimise the to-do list in those busy few weeks after a new baby is born!

<https://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/subjects/having-baby>

Mindfulness & emotional wellbeing

Trying to conceive and being pregnant are extremely exciting times, but can also be stressful. Good mental and emotional health is vital and we recommend you include some activities in your life that will improve your general wellbeing. These will be different for everyone, but some ideas are a regular time to connect with your partner or loved ones, mindfulness or meditation training, regular exercise and downtime doing activities you enjoy.

Some resources you might find useful are:

<http://www.relationships.org.au/>

<http://smilingmind.com.au/>