

# Yarning about planning a baby ...

## WHAT SHOULD I DO BEFORE I GET PREGNANT?

### Have a pre-pregnancy health check

It's a good idea to talk to a doctor or women's health nurse before you get pregnant to make sure you are healthy and know how to prepare to have a healthy pregnancy. This will help to reduce the risk of problems for you and the baby.

Below are some things you can think about or do before you stop using contraception and start trying to get pregnant.

### Try to make your life as healthy as you can

Lots of things can be bad for a baby while it's growing and developing inside you. If you can make some changes before you get pregnant it will help you and the baby stay well through the pregnancy.

#### Alcohol

- It is not safe to drink alcohol during pregnancy. Alcohol that you drink goes through the placenta (this provides the baby with oxygen and nutrients while it's in the uterus) to the baby and can cause serious problems in the baby's development, especially the brain.
- Because you don't know you're pregnant for a month or two, it is best to stop drinking before you start trying to get pregnant so the baby is not exposed to alcohol.
- A man's fertility can be affected by alcohol so it is probably best for men to have no more than two standard drinks a day.

#### Weight

- It is good if you start your pregnancy with a healthy weight. It will reduce your risk of developing gestational diabetes and improve the chances of a healthy pregnancy.
- If you are underweight or overweight it can also reduce your chance of getting pregnant.

#### Smoking

- If you smoke while you are pregnant the chemicals from the cigarettes can cause long-term damage to the lungs, brain and blood of your unborn baby.
- Smoking can also reduce the amount of oxygen and nutrients your baby gets, limiting its growth.



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- If you smoke, the baby can be born early and have a low birth weight which can cause kidney disease, diabetes and heart disease when they get older.
- Breathing second-hand smoke can also harm your baby so you should ask the people you live with to stop smoking or smoke outside.

#### Diet

- While you are pregnant you need to eat a healthy diet with enough vitamins, minerals and other nutrients to help the baby grow and develop.
- If you are not able to get enough nutrients from your diet, then you might need to take multivitamins.
- Folic acid or folate (found in leafy greens, broccoli, lentils and bread flour) is really important when you are pregnant because it prevents birth defects such as spina bifida. It's recommended that you take 400 micrograms a day. If you are at higher risk, see your health practitioner.
- Anaemia (a lack of iron) is more common in Indigenous women in pregnancy and you might need an iron supplement.
- Caffeine is not good for an unborn baby; try not to have more than one cup of coffee a day (or 2 cups of instant or 4 cups of tea).

#### Exercise

Regular exercise such as walking will help stop you putting on too much weight during your pregnancy. This will help you stay healthy and reduce your risk of developing gestational diabetes.

#### Immunisations

Developing conditions like measles, chicken pox or rubella while you are pregnant can harm your baby. Make

sure you've had your vaccinations before you get pregnant.

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) Make sure you treat and manage any STIs before you get pregnant to increase your chances of a healthy pregnancy and delivery.

#### Cervical (Pap) screening

Have a Pap test done before you get pregnant so that if there are any problems they can be treated before the pregnancy. An abnormal pap screen result can't be treated while you are pregnant.

#### Medication

If you are taking medications to manage any health conditions like blood pressure, epilepsy or kidney disease, it is important to check with a doctor that they are safe to take during pregnancy. You should do this before you get pregnant in case you need to change the medication.

#### Health conditions

Any health conditions like diabetes, hypertension, rheumatic heart disease or thyroid conditions need to be well managed before and during pregnancy. This is important for you and the baby. These conditions should be discussed with a doctor while you are planning your pregnancy.

*This article is an extract from the fact sheet 'Yarning about planning a baby' by Jean Hailes for Women's Health. This fact sheet is designed to be informative and educational. It is not intended to provide specific medical advice or replace advice from your health practitioner. For the full fact sheet visit <[https://jeanhailes.org.au/contents/documents/Resources/Fact\\_sheets/Yarning\\_about\\_planning\\_a\\_baby.pdf](https://jeanhailes.org.au/contents/documents/Resources/Fact_sheets/Yarning_about_planning_a_baby.pdf)>.*

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