

# Preconception care



Preconception health is a woman's health before she becomes pregnant. It focuses on the conditions and risk factors that could affect a woman if she becomes pregnant. The key to promoting preconception health is to combine the best health care, healthy behaviours, strong support, and safe environments at home and at work.

Good preconception health care is about managing current health conditions. By taking action on health issues BEFORE pregnancy, future problems for the mother and baby can be prevented. Preconception health care must be tailored to each individual woman. It means helping women and their partners reduce risks and get ongoing care. Men and other family members are also very important in supporting the goals of preconception health.

The seven most important things a woman can do for preconception health are:

- See your chiropractor. Getting regular checkups from your chiropractor allows your body to function optimally.
- Take 500 mcg of folic acid a day for at least 3 months before becoming pregnant to reduce the risk of birth defects. This has been shown to significantly reduce the incidence of neural tube defects such as spina bifida.
- Stop smoking – smoking is known to increase the risk of having a baby of low birth weight. Low birth weight babies have increased risks of other problems, and generally require a longer hospital stay, and more medical intervention.
- Stop any alcohol consumption - the Centre for Disease Control, in the USA, now recommends abstaining completely from drinking alcohol while pregnant. Current research suggests that even small amounts of alcohol may lead to foetal alcohol syndrome. At this stage, no level of alcohol has been established as being safe.
- If you currently have a medical condition, be sure these conditions are under control. Conditions include but are not limited to asthma, diabetes, oral health, obesity or epilepsy. Talk to your doctor about your plans to start a family and let them help you with checking on any current problems you may have.
- Talk to your doctor and pharmacist about any over the counter and prescription medicines you are taking, including vitamins and dietary or herbal supplements. Around 4 % of pregnant women are taking prescription or over the counter medication which could increase the risk of birth defects, without knowing it.
- Avoid exposures to toxic substances or potentially infectious materials at work or at home, such as chemicals or cat and rodent faeces.

It is important to ensure that you are eating a healthy well balanced diet. This allows your body to get all the nutrients it needs to function optimally. When your body is functioning optimally, it increases your chance of achieving a healthy pregnancy.

Your chiropractor will be able to discuss chiropractic care during all phases of your preconception, and pre-natal period. Having a nervous system that has normal tone allows you to enjoy your pregnancy, while limiting the aches and pains that can be associated with normal pregnancy including back pain, headaches, leg and pelvic pain.

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