

What Is Preconception Health?

Preconception health is a woman's health before becoming pregnant. It is important for women to become aware of health conditions and risk factors that can affect her health and that of her unborn child before becoming pregnant. Certain behaviors, food and health problems can affect pregnancy. It is important to make certain lifestyle changes such as quitting smoking and drinking as well as controlling certain diseases such as diabetes before becoming pregnant. Making these changes can improve the health of women and increase the chances of their babies being born healthy.

Approximately half of all pregnancies are unplanned. Birth defects occur early during pregnancy, usually 3-4 weeks after conception before women know they are pregnant. Preconception care can lower a woman and her baby's chances of having health problems during pregnancy. Preconception care applies to all women who have not been pregnant and those who plan to become pregnant again. Preconception care includes many topics including folic acid supplements, proper immunizations, healthy behaviors and family planning. This type of care may include prevention and management to prevent health issues from developing to the mother and baby.

Why Is It Important?

Many times prenatal care begins too late. Women who begin prenatal care early during or before pregnancy can greatly reduce the risk of maternal and child health problems. Preconception care can also reduce the chances of birth defects and maternal complications during labor and therefore increase a woman's chances of having a healthy pregnancy and a healthy baby.

What You Can Do

Talk to your health care provider about what you can do to have the best chance of having a healthy baby. Here are a few steps you may want to consider:

Folic Acid

- Take the recommended 400-800 micrograms of folic acid a day for 3 months before and after getting pregnant

Immunizations

- Get your immunizations before getting pregnant
- Talk to you health care provider about getting a Flu shot during Flu season while pregnant

Healthy Behaviors

- Quit smoking and avoid second hand smoke
- Quit drinking alcohol
- Avoid exposure to toxic substances
- Talk to your doctor about any medicines, supplements, vitamins and any other substances you may be taking
- Avoid eating fish that may contain high levels of mercury such as shark, swordfish, king mackerel and tilefish

Health Care Provider Instructions

Next Steps

Resources

NIH - http://www.nicdh.nih.gov/health/topics/preconception_care.cfm

CDC - <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/preconception/QandA.htm>

March of Dimes - <http://www.marchofdimes.com>

This material is for information purposes only and does not constitute medical advice. Materials adapted from "Every Woman, Every Time" developed by Sutter Medical Center Sacramento with funding from March of Dimes CA Chapter and "Healthy Women Florida" developed by the Florida Department of Health, Bureau of Family and Community Health.

"Supported in part by project H5MMC10864 from the U.S Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Child Health Bureau (Title V, Social Security Act)"

