

Facts for Men and Women About Health Before Pregnancy

A recent provincial telephone survey¹ of men and women between the ages of 25 and 45 found that:

- Ontarians feel that the primary considerations for **men** before pregnancy include saving money and securing a good, stable job.
- Ontarians feel that **women** should eat well and take care of themselves and make sure they have good overall health before becoming pregnant.

FACT: A man's health is also important when planning for a baby. A healthy baby is largely dependent on the health of *both* the mother and the father. Issues like family history, environmental hazards, and stress as well as nutrition, physical activity, smoking, alcohol, drugs, caffeine and sexually transmitted infections all need to be considered when planning for a baby.

Too much stress may prevent pregnancy

- If men or women are eating unhealthy food, not making time for exercise and losing sleep because of too much stress, they may also have a decreased chance of getting pregnant.
- In men, stress can play with hormone levels and with the amount of sperm they produce.
- Stress can change a woman's menstrual cycle and the timing of an egg being released.
- Stressing about not getting pregnant can decrease the chances of getting pregnant.

Family history and genetics of both the mother and father need to be considered

- Health problems can be passed on through families – by men and by women. The medical histories on both sides of the family should be researched before getting pregnant. Genetics counsellors can help advise on any physical, mental or other health problems such as cystic fibrosis or Down Syndrome.

Environmental hazards can affect healthy pregnancy outcomes

- If men or women are exposed to chemicals such as lead, pesticides, solvents or mercury it can become difficult to get pregnant and may cause health problems for the baby during pregnancy.
- Other environmental hazards to consider include viruses (rubella), bacteria, fungus, allergens (pollen, dust), molds, heavy lifting, gases (formaldehyde, carbon monoxide), dry cleaning chemicals, noises, heat, correction fluids, pesticides, second-hand smoke, spray cans, deodorizers, markers, photocopy machine toners, X-rays, soiled cat litter, computer terminals, microwaves, hairstyling products and insect repellents.

Nutrition is important for both men and women

- Healthy eating can help better the odds of getting pregnant. Research suggests that the roles both male and female bodies play in pregnancy can be affected by too much or too little of some important nutrients.

¹ Leger Marketing omnibus survey conducted November 2 to 7, 2004 on behalf of Best Start Resource Centre. A total of 395 interviews were completed. The margin of error for a sample of this size is +/- 4.9%, 19 times out of 20.

Smoking = poor swimmers

- A smoker's sperm has a harder time fertilizing a woman's egg to create a pregnancy.
- Smoking can make it harder for a man to get an erection and a smoker's sperm can't swim as fast to reach the "ready" egg.
- Smoking also makes it harder for some women to get pregnant.
- Smoking or exposure to second-hand smoke during pregnancy can increase the chance of miscarriage; cause a baby to be born too soon or too small; cause labour and delivery complications; and may result in the loss of the baby during birth.

Alcohol could drown sperm

- Men who drink alcohol have a greater chance of having low sperm counts – making it harder for a couple to get pregnant.
- No one knows for sure how much alcohol it takes to harm a baby as it forms inside a mom-to-be. If you are planning a pregnancy, you should cut out alcohol once you stop using birth control and know there is a chance of pregnancy.
- Alcohol use during pregnancy is the leading cause of brain damage in children.

Drugs can hinder performance

- Cocaine, heroin and high doses of marijuana can decrease sexual interest, sexual performance and sperm count.
- Large amounts of Acetaminophen (Tylenol) can lower a man's fertility.
- Recreational drug use during pregnancy can lead to babies with birth defects and learning disabilities.
- An over-the-counter or prescription drug that is safe for an adult may not be safe for a developing baby.

Diseases and infections can affect pregnancy planning

- If a man or a woman has not had chicken pox or rubella (German measles) they should be immunized before pregnancy.
- Cancer, mumps, diabetes, Hepatitis B, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV can affect the chances of making a pregnancy happen or having a healthy baby.
- Chlamydia is a common STI, that often has no signs or symptoms. If left untreated, chlamydia can lead to infertility.
- More Canadian women are becoming infected with HIV. An infected woman can spread HIV to her baby during pregnancy and delivery.

These are only some of the issues to consider when planning a pregnancy. For more information please visit www.healthbeforepregnancy.com

- 30 -

*For more information, please contact:
Danielle D'Agostino
danielle.dagostino@rogers.com
phone/fax: 905-274-7337*