



Is there a
baby in
your future?

Plan for it.



best start
meilleur départ

Ontario's maternal, newborn and early
child development resource centre
Centre de ressources sur la maternité,
les nouveau-nés et le développement
des jeunes enfants de l'Ontario



You plan for school, work, holidays and even your retirement. What about your baby? Parenting begins long before your baby is conceived.

*Babies begin to develop even before women know they are pregnant. This means that the time to prepare for your baby's health is before you even get pregnant. There are things that both **men and women** can do to improve the health of their future children.*

If you feel ready to start a family, read this brochure and talk to your health care provider. Ideally, begin planning for your pregnancy 3 months in advance.

Parenting – decisions, decisions

- ❖ *Am I ready to be a parent?*
- ❖ *Do I know how much a child will change my life?*
- ❖ *Do I know what it costs to raise a child?*



Both joys and challenges come with parenting. Mixed feelings about becoming a parent are normal. Talk to family, friends and other parents. Start discussing how you might deal with the emotional, physical and financial changes that parenthood brings. This will help you make decisions that are right for you.

Some couples take a long time to get pregnant. Talk to your health care provider if you are concerned.

Stress – no friend to either sperm or egg

❖ *Do I sleep well?*

❖ *Is the time I spend at work and at home balanced?*

❖ *Do I have support and get the help I need when I feel stressed or depressed?*

Too much stress can make it hard to follow good health habits. It can also keep a pregnancy from happening. Find ways to decrease your stress and talk about your feelings with others.

Most people need 7 to 9 hours of sleep each night. Getting enough sleep is one of the steps to managing stress. Regular physical activity and healthy eating help, too. Learn the signs of stress and depression. Know who you can call for help.

If you or your partner has a history of depression, talk to your health care provider before pregnancy. A history of depression can increase your risk of depression during pregnancy and after the birth of the baby.



Physical Activity – on the move

❖ *Do I participate in endurance, flexibility and strength exercises each week?*

❖ *Am I physically active for at least 60 minutes 4 to 7 days a week (even in ten minute increments)?*

Regular physical activity before pregnancy can make it easier to stay active during pregnancy. It increases the odds that your baby will be a healthy weight at birth. But try not to go overboard. Too much exercise can make it harder to get pregnant. Walking and using the stairs instead of the elevator are a healthy start. For more information access the Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines at

<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hppb/paguide/index.html>



Nutrition – balance and building blocks

- ❖ *Do I eat healthy meals and snacks most of the time?*
- ❖ *Do I take a folic acid supplement?*
- ❖ *Am I a healthy weight?*

A daily balance of fruit, vegetables, grains, dairy products and protein foods, for both men and women, help build healthy sperm and eggs. For more detailed information refer to Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating, at http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hpfb-dgpsa/onpp-bppn/food_guide_rainbow_e.html



Women in their child-bearing years also need to take a multi-vitamin containing 0.4 milligrams of folic acid every day to help prevent birth defects of the spine and brain. If you've had a problem with overeating or extreme dieting, now is the time to address this health concern, *before you get pregnant*. Underweight or overweight women may have difficulty getting pregnant. Talk to your health care provider about healthy eating, physical activity and how to reach your best weight.

Smoking – no more “ifs” “ands” or “butts”

- ❖ *Do I smoke?*
- ❖ *Is my home smoke-free? Do guests smoke outside?*
- ❖ *Do I stay away from second-hand smoke?*



A man's sperm is affected by smoking. A smoker's sperm has a harder time fertilizing a woman's egg to create a pregnancy. Being in a smoke filled room can have the same effect. Smoking during pregnancy can cause a baby to be born too soon or too small.

Give yourself some time to quit before pregnancy.

The first few weeks are the hardest. Work with your health care provider or a local 'quit smoking' program to achieve your goal of being smoke-free. Being smoke-free means your baby will have fewer breathing problems and ear infections. You will also reduce the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (crib or cot death).

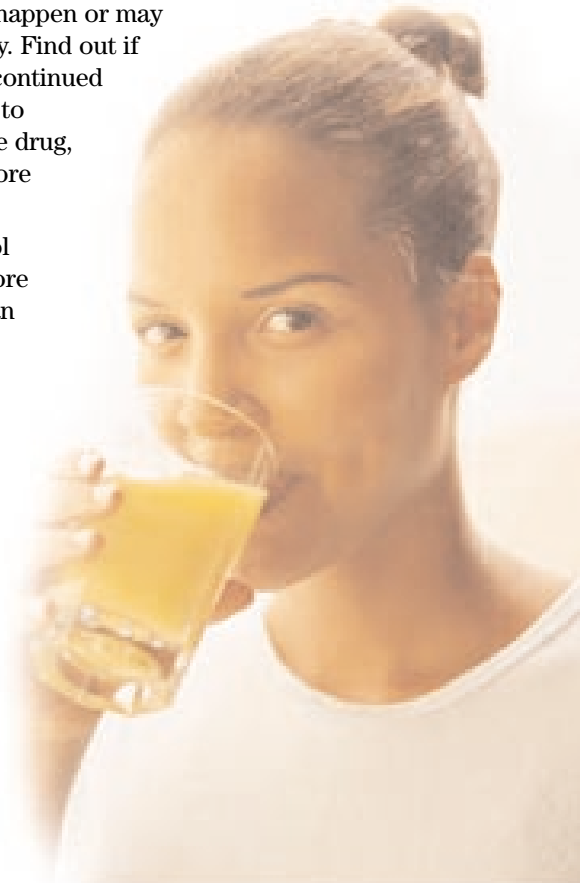
Caffeine, Drugs and Alcohol – powerful extras

- ❖ *Do I need to reduce my intake of caffeine?*
- ❖ *Have I talked to my health care provider and/or pharmacist about the prescription and over-the-counter drugs I may be using?*
- ❖ *Do I avoid alcoholic drinks?*
- ❖ *Do I use recreational drugs such as marijuana or cocaine?*

Too much caffeine may result in a baby being born underweight or with birth defects. While planning a pregnancy and during pregnancy limit your caffeine intake to 300 milligrams (1½ cups of coffee) a day. Cut back on all sources of caffeine: coffee, tea, colas, chocolate and some prescription and over-the-counter drugs.

Some prescription and over-the-counter drugs may make it harder for pregnancy to happen or may cause problems during pregnancy. Find out if the drugs you are taking can be continued during pregnancy. You may need to change the dosage, stop using the drug, or change to a different drug before planning a pregnancy.

It is safer to stop drinking alcohol and using recreational drugs before planning a pregnancy. Alcohol can affect a man's sperm. No known amount of alcohol is safe during pregnancy. Alcohol use during pregnancy is the leading cause of brain damage in children. Recreational drugs can lead to birth defects and learning disabilities. If you have questions about the amount of alcohol or drugs you take call Motherisk at 1-877-327-4636.



Family and Friends – ties that matter

❖ *Do I know the health history of my family and my partner?*

❖ *Do I have people to share my feelings with?*

❖ *Do I feel safe both physically and emotionally?*



Health problems can be passed on through families. Find out the medical histories on both sides of the family. If you know of any physical, mental or other health problems such as cystic fibrosis, sickle cell anemia or Downs syndrome, you may want to talk to a genetics counsellor before planning a pregnancy.

Family and friends can be a great support before, during and after pregnancy, however, sometimes relationships are

too difficult to handle. Woman abuse often starts or gets worse during pregnancy. Now is the time to be sure about your relationship – before you start planning a pregnancy. Having a baby **does not** make a bad relationship better; it only adds to the stress. If you are being abused, talk to someone you trust about the abuse. Call a crisis line listed in your phone book. Contact a local women’s shelter or call Assaulted Women’s Helpline at 1-866-863-0511 or 1-866-863-7868 or visit www.awhl.org. If you are an abuser, talk to your health care provider and consult, “Canada’s Programs for Men Who Abuse Their Partners” at <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hppb/familyviolence/pdfs/abusepar.pdf>

Environmental Chemicals – silent risks

❖ *Have I thought about the biological, physical and chemical hazards that surround me every day?*

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. To learn more about the biological, physical and chemical hazards you use at work, home and play, read the labels on all containers, check the material safety data sheets at your workplace, or call the Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System at 1-800-461-4383, Motherisk at 416-813-6780, or visit www.motherisk.org

Physical Examination – check-up

- ❖ *Have I booked my 'health before pregnancy' check-up with my health care provider?*
- ❖ *Are my immunizations up-to-date?*
- ❖ *Have I been tested for sexually transmitted infections (STIs)?*

Men and women benefit from a check-up prior to pregnancy. If you have had problems with a previous pregnancy, have a medical condition or are taking drugs, you may need specialized care before, during and after pregnancy.

Have you or your partner had infections such as chicken pox or rubella (German measles)? If not, you need to be immunized before pregnancy.

STIs may make it difficult to get pregnant and can harm an unborn baby. Chlamydia is a common STI. It often has no signs or symptoms. If left untreated, chlamydia can lead to infertility. There are many other STIs including HIV/AIDS. Talk to your health care provider about being tested for STIs. Learn how to prevent a pregnancy until you are ready to start your family.

Breastfeeding – nature's gift

- ❖ *Is breastfeeding the healthiest choice for my baby?*
- ❖ *Have I thought about the risks of formula feeding?*
- ❖ *Do I know where to get reliable information on breastfeeding, before and after the baby is born?*

Most parents decide how to feed their baby before they are even pregnant. Breastfeeding is the healthiest choice for a baby. Breast milk provides more nutrition than what manufactured formula can offer (no matter what the advertisements claim). Formula feed babies get respiratory infections that require hospitalization, more often than breastfed babies. Talk to your family, friends and health care provider about how you would like to feed your baby. Find out the facts. Your public library has lots of books on breastfeeding. Contact your local public health unit for more information.



Creating healthier parents and babies.

This brochure provides an overview of a healthy start for a future baby and a future parent. Talk to your health care provider or contact your local public health unit, 1-800-268-1154.

Is there a baby in your future? Plan for it.

www.healthbeforepregnancy.ca



Best Start: Ontario's Maternal,
Newborn and Early Child Development
Resource Centre www.beststart.org

Best Start is a key program of the
Ontario Prevention Clearinghouse (www.opc.on.ca).

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Financial assistance by Ontario Early Years

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