



How to Build a Healthy Baby



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?

We used to think that all a man needed to do to prepare for a baby was save some money and set up the crib, but many things contribute to producing a healthy baby. Men are not silent partners in the making of a baby. The health of the man plays an important role in his ability to create a baby and to have healthy children.

When conception does not occur as planned, the cause is sometimes due to the man, sometimes due to the woman and sometimes due a combination of both.



A Man's Health Before Pregnancy Can Affect the Baby

What's up doc? A family history of certain health conditions, some medications and diseases take on new meaning when baby planning. High blood pressure, arthritis, depression, cancer, mumps, diabetes, Hepatitis B, sexually transmitted infections and HIV can affect your chances for making a pregnancy happen or having a healthy baby.

Healthy sperm... Sperm is continuously produced. It takes about three months for sperm to fully develop and its quality may be affected by many factors during that time: heat, chemicals, recreational and prescription drugs, infections, etc. For example, cocaine may increase the number of abnormal sperm. Sperm quality also decreases gradually as men age.

Booze news... alcohol can damage the quality of sperm. Research says heavy alcohol use may affect sperm formation and function, or may cause impotence.



Sperm that really smoke... what good are a lot of sperm if only a few work well? Sperm quality can be affected by smoking. Research also indicates a slight increase in certain types of cancer in children of smoking fathers. Smoking can make it harder for a man to get an erection. The sperm also can't swim as fast to reach the egg. Smokers' sperm has a harder time getting into the woman's egg to create a pregnancy.



The right stuff... you are what you eat. If your body is poorly fed and nourished, so are your sperm and sex drive.

Working grind... sperm can be affected by toxins or poisons in your environment. You might face these on the job or at home and not realize it.

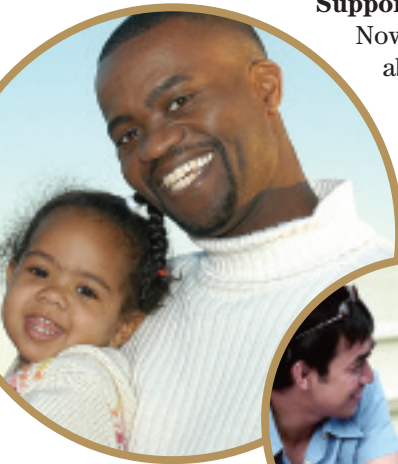
Exposure to toxins and poisons such as lead and pesticides before pregnancy can affect sperm quality. Your work clothes may also bring home contaminants to your pregnant partner.



It's too darn hot... some men who work in extremely hot environments such as foundries or bakeries or use hot tubs and saunas for relaxation have experienced a low sperm count.

Supporting each other...

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. Having a child results in a lifelong connection to your partner.



Is there a baby in your future?

Plan for it. Here is what you can do.

- ✓ Find out about your family health history. Contact your health care provider or a genetics clinic if there are any family medical conditions you are concerned about such as severe allergies, heart malformations or mental disorders.

- ✓ Book a physical examination – check up with your health care provider. Some prescription and over-the-counter drugs may make it harder for pregnancy to happen. You may need to change the dosage, stop using the drug, or change to a different drug before planning a pregnancy.

- ✓ Make sure your immunizations are up-to-date. Have you had infections such as chicken pox or rubella (German measles)? If not, you need to be immunized before planning a pregnancy. Such infections could damage the sperm; they could also increase the risk of infecting your partner, even if she has been immunized, as immunizations are not always 100% effective.

- ✓ It is safer to stop drinking alcohol and smoking before planning a pregnancy. If you have questions or concerns about the amount of alcohol or tobacco you use, contact your health care provider or local addiction services.

- ✓ Prescription, over-the-counter and recreational drugs can affect the quality and quantity of sperm. Herbal medicines and body-building supplements are drugs too! Check with your health care provider for any side effects.
Fact sheets are available at www.otispregnancy.org

- ✓ A healthy diet builds healthy sperm. For detailed information refer to Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating (http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/fg_rainbow-arc_en_ciel_ga_e.html).

- ✓ Become aware of possible environmental risks at your job and in your home. For more information contact: Workplace Hazardous Materials Info System (1-800-268-8013).

- ✓ Work with your colleagues and employer to promote a healthy workplace that supports the needs of future and existing fathers.

- ✓ Talk with your partner about your readiness to become parents. Sort out relationship issues before planning a pregnancy. For help, talk to your health care provider or a local counselling service.

- ✓ Educate yourself about healthy pregnancies and the benefits of breastfeeding. Support your partner in healthy lifestyle choices such as not drinking alcohol when planning or during a pregnancy.





Pre-test: Are you ready for fatherhood?

Do I like children?

How do I feel about having a child around all the time?

Could I handle a child and a job at the same time?

Do I qualify for a parental leave?

Do I welcome the opportunity of falling in love with my child?

Who are my role models?

Can I identify myself as a “family man”?

What skills can I share with and teach to my children?

Am I ready to change my daily routine to meet my baby's needs?

Can I afford to support a child?

Am I patient enough to deal with the noise and the confusion and the 24-hour a day responsibility?

What kind of time and space do I need for myself?

Am I ready to totally turn my priorities upside down; it will NOW be Family, Work, and then Social Life/ Personal Time?



Creating healthier fathers and babies.



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

For more information, visit:
www.healthbeforepregnancy.ca
www.mydad.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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