

Pregnancy



Planning for a pregnancy is an exciting time. To improve your chances of success, both partners need to look after their health and live a healthy lifestyle. This includes quitting smoking, exercising regularly, ceasing or reducing alcohol consumption, maintaining a healthy weight and eating plenty of fresh food such as fruit, vegetables, salads, fish and lean meat. When both partners follow a healthy lifestyle, you increase your chance of fertility. Once you are pregnant it is important to maintain a healthy lifestyle and eat well.

Lifestyle options

Tracking ovulation – ovulation is when a woman releases an egg from her ovary. It occurs 14 days before the first day of the next period (not after). The best time to fall pregnant is by having intercourse within a day or so of ovulation.

Diet – some Australians do not consume enough nutrients in their diet. Pregnant women have a higher risk of being low (deficient) in nutrients because their body's nutritional needs change during pregnancy. Pregnant women should eat a diet rich in nutrients, particularly folate, iodine and iron. Some specific considerations are:

- **Folate** levels that are appropriate can reduce the chances of foetal spine or brain development problems, such as spina bifida or neural tube defects. It is recommended that supplements are taken for a least one month prior to conception and continued for the first three months of pregnancy. **Folate** rich foods include leafy green vegetables such as broccoli, lentils, and fruit including oranges and bananas. In Australia, bread is fortified with folate and iodine and as part of our public health strategy.
- **Iron** needs increase in pregnancy and there is a risk of having a premature or low birth weight baby if the mother's iron levels are low. **Iron** is found in high levels in red meat, other meats, fortified breads and cereals, green leafy vegetables, legumes and some nuts.
- **Iodine** levels that are low can affect physical development and can contribute to hearing and learning difficulties in the developing child. **Iodine** is found in seafood and some table salt, but levels in foods such as milk and vegetables can vary.

Discuss your specific supplement needs with your pharmacist or doctor as soon as you start to think about falling pregnant or as soon as you find that you are pregnant.

Caffeine – if intake is high there is an increased risk of miscarriage or low birth weight. If possible, avoid caffeine completely during pregnancy, or if trying to fall pregnant reduce to 300 mg per day or less. The amount of caffeine in coffee varies depending on several factors such as the type and brand of coffee and how it has been prepared. On average, a cup of coffee contains approximately 95 mg of caffeine. Consider decaffeinated coffee or herbal teas instead.

Vaccinations – ask your pharmacist for advice if you must travel to areas where vaccinations are required, or you need the influenza, rubella or chicken pox vaccines.

Exercising and managing weight – exercise should be sensible and regular. Non body-contact exercise is best, such as walking and swimming. Avoid intense exercise or getting overheated. A healthy body weight increases the chances of a woman falling pregnant.

Smoking and alcohol – ideally abstain for three months before falling pregnant and during pregnancy.

Managing stress levels – use relaxation techniques.

Oral and dental health – teeth and gums can be affected by pregnancy hormones and food cravings. See your dentist regularly.

Listeriosis – Listeria are bacteria that can cause the death of an unborn baby. Avoid foods such as unpasteurised milk, soft cheeses, cold processed meats, pre-cut fruit and salads, pâté, raw seafood and smoked seafood. Always wash raw vegetables, cook meat well and wash kitchen utensils after preparing uncooked food.

Toxoplasmosis – Toxoplasmosis is caused by parasites that are harmful to humans. They can be picked up through infected cat faeces or eating uncooked or undercooked meat. Ask someone else to clean cat litter boxes daily, wear disposable rubber gloves for handling soil that may have cats' faeces. Carefully wash hands after gardening or handling raw meat. All meat should be well cooked before eating.

Pharmacy options

Always inform pharmacy staff if you are pregnant or planning a pregnancy.

Your pharmacist can:

- Recommend the correct dose of supplements, such as folic acid, iron and iodine for pre-conception and pregnancy, and supplements for men.
- Recommend how to manage constipation, heartburn and reflux, varicose veins and stretch marks during pregnancy. See *Constipation* and *Heartburn and Indigestion* Health Information Brochures, for more information and ask your pharmacist.
- Provide and discuss the use of ovulation and pregnancy tests.
- Recommend quit smoking products.
- Give advice on which medicines are safe to take when planning or during pregnancy.
- Explain what foods or medicines can affect iron absorption, such as tea, coffee and calcium.
- Advise about vaccinations during pregnancy such as rubella, chicken pox and influenza.
- Discuss nutrition and how to reduce infection risk, such as listeria.

More information

Pregnancy birth and baby: www.pregnancybirthbaby.org.au/being-pregnant

Sources of folate rich food: www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/health-publth-strateg-folate-fofacts

Health Direct: www.healthdirect.gov.au

Disclaimer: The information provided is a guide only, is current at time of publishing, and is not intended to replace the advice of your pharmacist or doctor.

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