

Preconception Plan

1. Fill out the Health History Checklist.

It will help you and your care provider talk about your personal health, pregnancy, birth and parenthood. Both you and your partner should fill out the entire checklist. Make an appointment with your care provider before you get pregnant and take the completed checklist with you.

2. Start good health habits now.

- Don't Smoke. Be aware of sources of secondary smoke where you live, work and spend free time. Inhaling smoke changes the way your body circulates your blood and reduces the amount of oxygen that gets to your baby. Women who smoke have more miscarriages, stillbirths, infant deaths, low birth weight and impaired nervous system development in their babies. Babies who are smaller than normal may develop more health complications after birth. Nervous system problems may lead to learning and behavior problems in toddlers and school-aged children. Children of smokers have more asthma. The more you smoke, the greater the risk to you and your baby.
- Don't drink alcohol. Alcohol can change the way the baby grows early in the pregnancy and it can lead to mental retardation and other abnormalities. There is no known safe amount of alcohol that a woman can drink when she's pregnant. What might be safe for one woman might not be safe for another. It's safest not to drink alcohol at all.
- Don't use recreational or street drugs. Drugs can affect the growing baby during pregnancy like smoking and alcohol. Babies are born addicted. They're fussy and irritable during withdrawal.
- Ask your care provider before using any over-the-counter or prescription medicines, vitamins or herbs. They can act like alcohol, changing the way baby grows and develops.
- Reduce the amount of caffeinated beverages you drink, like colas or coffee. Caffeine is a stimulant and can make you and your baby nervous and irritable. Withdrawal happens after the baby is born.
- Stabilize your weight before you get pregnant. Weight loss diets may be too low in nutrients to support a healthy developing fetus.
- Eat well-balanced meals, including
 1. Breads, cereal, rice and pasta (6-11 servings)
 2. Vegetables (3 servings)
 3. Fruits (3 servings)
 4. Milk, yogurt and cheese (3 servings)
 5. Meat, poultry, fish, dried beans, eggs and nuts (2 servings)
 6. Take a daily vitamin supplement that has 0.4 milligrams of Folic Acid each day. This essential nutrient has been shown to reduce the risk of having a baby with a birth defect of the brain or spinal cord. Fortified breakfast cereals, spinach and other leafy greens, oranges and grapefruits, dried beans/peas and liver have lots of Folic Acid.

See a registered dietician if you have trouble with serving sizes or need help planning what to eat. Ask your care provider for a referral to Mercy's Nutrition Department at 589-9655.
- Make sure your dental care is up to date before you get pregnant. Having x-rays or dental procedures done and taking medicines should be avoided during pregnancy if possible.
- Stop taking Birth Control pills and give your body a chance to start normal periods.
- Check out your home and workplace areas for risks to your pregnancy. See the examples in the Preconception Checklist enclosed. Try to avoid them or reduce them as much as possible. Always tell dentists, other doctors, x-ray technicians, nurses and other health care workers that you are trying to become pregnant before they give you a new medication, do x-rays or other procedures. You may be pregnant already and not know it.

- Start a moderate exercise program before you become pregnant. Very heavy exercise may stop your periods and make it harder to become pregnant or sustain a pregnancy. Avoiding all exercise is not a good idea. Moderate exercise will help you be in the kind of good physical condition that you can maintain during your pregnancy. Ask your care provider for suggestions.

3. Changes in lifestyle and relationships.

Talk with your partner and other members of your support network about sharing or splitting household duties, childcare, career or job changes, and how you will meet your responsibilities. Get them to support you in the diet and exercise changes you may be trying to make. Babies and young children learn their eating and exercise habits from the people they live with and they see everything! Encourage your partner to join you in a healthier lifestyle now.

4. Identify the Pregnancy as soon as possible.

- Be alert to signs of pregnancy: missing your menstrual period, feeling sick or dizzy, feeling tired, breast tenderness and needing to urinate more often.
- Go to your care provider as soon as possible for a pregnancy test. If you use a home pregnancy test kit from the drug store, you still need your care provider to confirm it.
- Start prenatal care early. Set up a schedule of prenatal appointments and keep them.

5. Sign up for birth education classes.

Mercy Birth Center offers a variety of learning opportunities for expectant parents. View our Pregnancy Classes online, or get one of our brochures from your care provider. You may also call **58-BIRTH** or **1-800-99-BIRTH**. Sign up early to get your choice of classes - they do fill up fast!

There is a lot to learn, and these classes can help with the latest information from nurses who work with pregnant, laboring and newly delivered moms and their families every day.