

Live Well to
Learn Well

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Thinking about having a baby can be exciting, but you may have questions, too. There are many factors to consider, including your health and wellbeing. Planning ahead will help you do what you can to ensure a healthy pregnancy.

Since conception occurs about two weeks before your period, you may be more than three weeks pregnant before you realize you have conceived; however, a fetus is most sensitive to harm two to eight weeks after conception. That's why it's best to start treating yourself "as if you're pregnant" as soon as you think you may want to become so. Below are some steps to take in preparation for pregnancy.

Consult a health care provider

This is especially important if you:

- Have a health condition such as high blood pressure, diabetes, hypothyroidism, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), HIV, a seizure disorder, or obesity, as these can affect the pregnancy.
- Know of certain diseases that tend to run in your family, such as Thalassemia, Huntington's or Tay-Sachs.
- Take any prescription or non-prescription medications, alternative medications, or supplements, as some of these can be unsafe during pregnancy.
- Do not have regular menstrual periods, as it may make conception more difficult.
- Have been trying to conceive without success for more than 12 months if under 35 years old, and more than six months if over 35.

Update your immunizations

Some illnesses such as varicella (Chicken Pox) and rubella (German Measles) can be dangerous to a developing fetus, but can be prevented by a vaccine. If you have not previously had these infections or been immunized against them, a vaccination given three months before conception will be protective.

Anyone who will be pregnant during the annual flu season should get a flu shot. Consider updating other immunizations such as tetanus and pertussis as well.

Consider your nutrition

Now is a great time to take a careful look at your nutrition. Try to get an idea about your overall nutrition needs and the additional nutritional needs or pregnancy. Cornell Health offers nutrition appointments with registered



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dietitians who can offer individualized nutritional recommendations. Note that some foods should be limited or avoided in pregnancy:

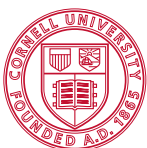
- **Be cautious and limit these foods:** swordfish, kingfish, tuna, king mackerel and shark, as they may contain methylmercury, a metal which can harm a developing fetus.
- **Avoid these foods:** raw fish, unpasteurized foods and drinks and under-cooked meats or eggs. Likewise, limit or avoid hot dogs and cold cuts due to risks of listeria infection. If you do eat these foods, reheat them until steaming hot.
- **Limit caffeine:** Most experts agree that caffeine in small amounts (no more than 200 mg per day or the equivalent of 2 – 8oz cups of coffee) appears safe for pregnant people. Some studies have shown higher amounts of caffeine can cause miscarriage or low birth weight in babies. Be aware of other sources of caffeine in your diet such as candy, soda and tea when you are deciding how much caffeine is safe for you.

Additional recommendations on food safety before and during pregnancy can be found at on the FDA website: fda.gov/consumers/womens-health-topics/pregnancy.

Supplement with folic acid

People who don't get enough folic acid, especially very early in pregnancy, are more likely to have a baby with serious birth defects. Folic acid is found naturally in dark green leafy vegetables, liver, fruit, green beans, and whole grains, but most sources recommend a daily supplement of 400

(over)



mcg (regardless of nutritional intake or daily over-the-counter prenatal vitamins) to ensure adequate supply, starting one month before conception. Those who have already had a pregnancy affected by a neural tube defect or who have certain health conditions should talk with their health care provider about needing more folic acid.

Consider your lifestyle

Your lifestyle choices can either support or challenge a healthy pregnancy.

- **Regular exercise** may be beneficial to you before and during pregnancy, as it can make your pregnancy and delivery easier. If you haven't been exercising, start now, before you are pregnant. Walking 3-4 times per week is a good choice. Most exercise can be continued throughout pregnancy, but it is important to consult your health care provider, and not to overdo it.
- **A healthy body weight** will serve you well during pregnancy. Both underweight and overweight people are at higher risk for pregnancy complications. If nutritional concerns are complicating your efforts to obtain a healthy body weight, consider consulting with a nutritionist at Cornell Health. Appointments can be made online at myCornellHealth or by calling 607-255-5155.

Lifestyle habits/practices to AVOID now and during pregnancy include:

- **Smoking tobacco** can cause miscarriage, premature birth, low birth weight and other health problems in your baby. Cut back if you can't quit completely. Your health care provider can help.
 - **Drinking alcohol** while pregnant can cause physical and mental birth defects. No amount of alcohol has been found to be "safe" in pregnancy. Avoidance of alcoholic beverages well before pregnancy can help normalize this practice for the months when you are pregnant or nursing. Cornell Health has individualized programs available to help you stop using alcohol if this is your goal. Talk with your health care provider.
- **Taking some non-prescription medications.** Even some "basic" non-prescriptions such as ibuprofen and aspirin have been linked to an increased risk of early miscarriage. Check any pain and/or cold remedies and use only acetaminophen (Tylenol-based) products if needed. Call Cornell Health about beginning any new nonprescription or herbal medicine during pregnancy.
 - **Using other drugs** such as marijuana, cocaine, and others can raise the risk of miscarriage, birth defects and addiction in the baby. If abstaining from these substances is a problem, please talk with your health care provider about resources available to help you.

External influences

- **Excessive heat** can be harmful. Avoid saunas or soaking in a hot tub or bath now and during the first few months of pregnancy. The fertility of people assigned male at birth may also be adversely affected by high heat.
- **Toxoplasmosis**, a parasite that can be spread through the feces of cats, can cause birth defects. You should avoid cleaning your cat's litter box, gardening without gloves and eating raw or under-cooked meat now and throughout your pregnancy.
- **Occupational dangers** such as radiation, exposure to heavy metals (lead, copper and mercury), carbon disulfide, acids, and anesthetics can affect a pregnancy. Examine your workplace and talk with your supervisor about any concerns you have. Information about other specific pregnancy risks can be found at:
 - Guidelines for Reproductive Health & the Workplace: [cdc.gov/niosh/topics/repro](https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/repro)
 - Information for animal handlers at Cornell: research.cornell.edu/care/ohs.html
 - List of chemicals and medications and how they can affect pregnancy: [fda.gov/consumers/womens-health-topics/pregnancy](https://www.fda.gov/consumers/womens-health-topics/pregnancy)

Emotional stressors

While the health of your physical body is important, your mental wellbeing matters too! You may have questions or concerns about finances, relationships, family pressures, worries about the impact of parenthood on one's academic or job performance, the availability of childcare and other support services, etc.

Cornell Health has several places for you to talk about these kinds of concerns. You may want to start by talking with a member of our counseling staff at a "Let's Talk" walk-in session consultation. Counseling at Cornell Health can also be scheduled online at myCornellHealth or by calling 607-255-5155.

Practice patience

While it may seem that others become pregnant easily and with little or no planning, the statistical chance of conception each month is only one in 5 or 6. It is common for it to take six months to a year to achieve pregnancy, even with no infertility obstacles.

If you are practicing unprotected sex during your most fertile times of the month and do not become pregnant after 6 months, are older than 35, or are having changes in your menstrual cycle, consult your health care provider.