

## Preparing for Pregnancy

Having a baby is an important responsibility as well as one of life's greatest joys for women. It is vital that a woman contemplating pregnancy take an "inventory" of her lifestyle and optimize her chances of having a normal baby.

Chronological age factors heavily in a woman's ability to conceive as well as the risk of having a fetus with a chromosomal abnormality. The younger you are, the more fertile you are likely to be. In addition, the risk of birth defects such as Down's syndrome increases with age. This is not to say age should be the only consideration when thinking about getting pregnant. Other important factors contribute to a woman's final decision including personal, financial and professional. Each person has to arrive at this monumental decision taking into consideration what works best for her.

Let's start with some basics when taking that inventory.

1. Nutrition includes ideal weight and eating habits. Both extremes of being too heavy or too thin can affect the outcome of a pregnancy. Therefore, learning and then implementing healthy eating habits is essential to maintaining an ideal weight before and during pregnancy. Fad diets must be discarded and replaced with a sensible selection from all the major food groups consumed in reasonable portions. Folic acid in particular has been shown to prevent open spine defects and can be ingested through leafy vegetables or with supplements at least three months before conception.
2. Exercise is an effective way to improve weight control and the immune system. A woman's overall health is always positively impacted with regular workouts. It is wise to choose a form of exercise than can be continued throughout your pregnancy. Non weight bearing forms of exercise such as swimming can be a good total body workout during your pregnancy and prevent stress on joints not use to the extra pounds.
3. Habits such as tobacco, alcohol and recreational drugs must be avoided during pregnancy and best to begin this process when you start trying to conceive.
4. Prescription drugs for medical conditions should be addressed with your Obstetrician *before* you conceive. Some may be necessary and as with anything else, the risk of stopping them must be weighed against the risk for causing harm to a developing fetus.
5. Emotional state is often downplayed when choosing to conceive. Sometimes a pregnancy is seen as a way to improve a bad relationship or marriage. This is a common mistake and the best advice is to "get your house in order" before taking

this important step towards parenthood when you are responsible for the emotional health of another human being.

6. Previous pregnancy history should be reviewed with your doctor if it contains bad outcomes such as repeated pregnancy loss or serious complications in a previous pregnancy.

There are many other things to consider but these are some of the most crucial elements that should be addressed before attempting to become pregnant. Don't short change yourself or the life you plan to create and nurture. Be smart, prepare.