

Planning a Pregnancy

Whether you are only starting to consider becoming pregnant or have been trying for a while, healthy eating and lifestyle will help prepare your body and improve your fertility. Here are some top tips for this important time in a woman's life:

Be a healthy weight

Extremes of body weight are not good for fertility, being too heavy or too light can make it more difficult to become pregnant. To help maintain a healthy body weight:

- Take regular exercise for at least 30 minutes a day on most days of the week, e.g. brisk walking, swimming, cycling, aerobics.
- Do some weight-bearing or resistance exercises to help build muscle and reduce body fat. Examples are using dumbbell weights, resistance bands or attending gym classes that focus on similar exercises.
- Get your 5-a-day of fruit and vegetables every day.
- Avoid food and beverages high in fat and sugar, e.g. cakes, biscuits, confectionary, fizzy drinks, fried foods and take-aways.

Take a folic acid supplement daily

All women who are capable of becoming pregnant, whether planning a pregnancy or not, are recommended to take a folic acid supplement of 400µg daily. This will make sure you have adequate folate stores if you do become pregnant and your baby will be protected against neural tube defects. You should take folic acid for 3 months before pregnancy and for 12 weeks into pregnancy.

If you have had a previous pregnancy affected by a neural tube defect, you will need to take a higher dose folic acid supplement of 5mg per day to help prevent this from reoccurring in your next pregnancy. You should also speak to your doctor about a higher dose if you have type 1 diabetes.

Build up your iron stores

Pregnant women are at risk of developing iron deficiency anaemia so it is best to enter pregnancy with good iron stores. The best dietary source of iron is red meat so you should aim to eat a serving of this once to twice a week. Poultry and fish are also good sources. Eggs, beans, nuts, green leafy vegetables and fortified breakfast cereals contain iron that is not as easily absorbed in our bodies as the iron in meat and fish. Vitamin C can help the absorption of this iron so it is good to have a portion of fruit or fruit juice around the same time as eating these foods. On the other hand, tea and calcium make the iron more difficult to absorb so you should have your cup of tea or dairy foods at separate times.

Avoid alcohol and smoking

Regular alcohol intake and any amount of smoking can reduce your chances of becoming pregnant. These habits affect the fertility of both men and women so encourage your partner to support your healthy lifestyle and quit the habits while trying for a baby. Once you do

become pregnant, continue to avoid the cigarettes and alcohol for a healthy pregnancy and baby.

Updated by Fiona Dunlevy MINDI and Orna O Brien, MINDI January 2016

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