

Health tip: Healthy pregnancy

Pregnancy is a journey full of many changes, physically and mentally. Knowing that you are doing all you can to stay healthy during pregnancy and give your baby a healthier start in life will help you have peace of mind.¹

Preconception:

Consider these guidelines to help prepare for a healthy pregnancy.²

- Make a plan and take action
- See the doctor
- Understand medical conditions
- Change lifestyle and behaviors as needed
- Assess medications you may be taking
- Stay up to date on necessary vaccinations
- Consume enough folic acid
- Stop drinking alcohol, smoking and using certain drugs
- Avoid toxic substances
- Maintain a healthier weight
- Get help for violence
- Learn the family history
- Focus on mental health

What to expect by trimester

1st trimester³

Pregnancy is divided into trimesters. The first trimester is the timeframe referring to the **first 12 weeks** of pregnancy. **For Prenatal care, that first visit is likely set up around week 7 or later.** The health care provider will treat, educate, and reassure the mother throughout the pregnancy. The first visit will focus on assessing the overall health and health history, identifying any risk factors, and determining the baby's gestational age. After the first visit, the mother will probably be asked to schedule checkups every four weeks for the first 32 weeks of pregnancy.

2nd trimester⁴

The second trimester encompasses **weeks 13–27** and is a time from major fetal development and physical growth. Pregnant women will feel this development as the uterus expands and added weight is gained. Fetal movement may be felt around the half-way point or 20 weeks gestation, which may be a very exciting monument in the pregnancy. A fetal ultrasound generally occurs around 20 weeks.



3rd trimester⁵

The third trimester, or weeks **28–40+** of pregnancy may be physically and emotionally challenging. The baby's size and position might make it hard for the mother to get comfortable. Braxton Hicks contractions may occur. These mild, irregular contractions feel like a slight tightness in the abdomen. Contact the health care provider if the contractions become regular and steadily increase in strength. Backaches, shortness of breath, spider veins, varicose veins, hemorrhoids, and frequent urination are also commonly reported. During the third trimester, the health care provider might ask the mother to come in for more frequent checkups – perhaps every two weeks beginning at week 32 and every week beginning at week 36.



Nutrition during pregnancy⁶

During pregnancy, the basic principles of healthier eating remain the same – get plenty of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean protein and healthier fats. However, a few nutrients in a pregnancy diet deserve special attention.

- **Folate is a B vitamin** that helps prevent serious problems with the developing brain and spinal cord (neural tube defects).
- **Calcium** supports healthy functioning of the circulatory, muscular and nervous system. Dairy products are the best absorbed sources of calcium.
- **Vitamin D** works with calcium to help build the baby's bones and teeth. Fatty fish, such as salmon, is a great source of vitamin D.
- **Protein** is crucial for the baby's growth throughout pregnancy. Lean meat, poultry, seafood and eggs are great sources of protein.
- **Iron** needs are doubled during pregnancy. The body needs this iron to make more blood to supply oxygen to the baby. If the mother doesn't consume enough iron during pregnancy, she could develop iron deficiency anemia, develop headaches, or become fatigued. Severe iron deficiency anemia during pregnancy also increases the risk of premature birth, having a low-birthweight baby and postpartum depression. Lean red meat, poultry and fish are good sources of iron. Prenatal vitamins typically contain iron.

Exercise and Pregnancy:⁷



According to scientific evidence, the risks of moderate-intensity aerobic activity, such as brisk walking, are very low for healthier pregnant women. Unless the mother has a medical reason to avoid physical activity during or after the pregnancy, she may begin or continue moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity. Pregnant or postpartum women should aim for 150 minutes (for example, 30 minutes a day, five days a week) of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity per week, such as brisk walking, during and after their pregnancy.

Sources:

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3. Mayo Clinic. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/pregnancy-week-by-week/basics/first-trimester/hlv-20049471#:~:text=The%20first%20few%20months%20of%20pregnancy%20%E2%80%94%20the,is%20a%20time%20of%20rapid%20growth%20and%20development.> November 2022. Accessed May 2024.
4. Mayo Clinic. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/pregnancy-week-by-week/in-depth/fetal-development/art-20046151>. June 2023. Accessed May 2024.
5. Mayo Clinic. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/pregnancy-week-by-week/in-depth/pregnancy/art-20046767>. March 2022. Accessed May 2024.
6. Mayo Clinic. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/pregnancy-week-by-week/in-depth/pregnancy-nutrition/art-20045082>. February 2022. Accessed May 2024.
7. CDC. <https://www.cdc.gov/physical-activity-basics/guidelines/healthy-pregnant-or-postpartum-women.html> November 2023. Accessed June 2024.

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