

Conception

Pre-Conception Advice:

If you are planning on having a baby, there are several things you can do to promote the wellbeing of your own health and that of your baby.

A Healthy, Pre-Pregnancy Routine:

This will ensure that you are in good mental and physical shape and this will have a positive effect on your baby, not just at birth but for the rest of his or her life.

Contraception is an issue:

If you have been taking the pill, it is best to wait for at least 3 months after you have stopped taking the pill before trying for a baby. Don't forget to use a different form of contraception, like a condom or cap, until you are ready to conceive.

Check your Rubella Status:

A Rubella (German measles) vaccination is recommended if you are non-immune (a simple blood test will indicate this, as exposure to the virus in early pregnancy can result in a seriously handicapped child). However, you must not conceive for at least 3 months following vaccination, as there is a high risk of abnormality in the foetus.

Stop Smoking:

Studies show that smoking in both mothers and fathers reduces the ability to conceive. There is also an increased rate of miscarriage, premature birth and lower birth weight. Also, children of smokers have a slight reduction in reading ability and an increase in cot death syndrome.

Avoid Alcohol:

Miscarriage rates are higher in drinkers and high levels of alcohol can cause foetal alcohol syndrome. Moderate drinking has not shown effects to date but alcohol **Does** cross the placenta and may affect the baby's brain and liver.

Diet & Hygiene:

Avoid Vitamin A Supplements or food rich in Vitamin A (such as liver).

- Eat foods rich in Folate (such as sprouts, asparagus, spinach and fortified cereals).
- Take Folic Acid (0.4mg a day from pre-conception to week 12 weeks of pregnancy). This helps to prevent spinal cord problems developing in the baby. You can buy these from pharmacies.
- Anything higher must be prescribed by your GP.
- Ensure home grown produce is well washed in view of cats (Toxoplasmosis) and avoid contact with cat litter trays.
- Avoid chill/cook produce and unpasteurised cheeses and milks including goat's milk, undercooked meats, eggs, soft cheeses, such as camembert, shellfish, raw fish throughout your pregnancy (Listeria).
- Fish which may contain a lot of mercury. Don't eat shark, marlin, swordfish, also limit tuna to no more than the equivalent of six tuna sandwiches per week.
- Avoid sheep, lambs, cat faeces, cat litters which may carry certain infections.

- Avoid peanuts, if you have a personal or family history of eczema, hay fever or asthma.
- Wash your hands after handling raw meat, or handling cats and kittens. To avoid certain germs which can be harmful to a developing baby.
- Wear gloves when gardening. Again, to avoid certain germs.
- You should cut down on Caffeine in tea, coffee, cola etc. Have no more than 300mg per day. This is about three cups of brewed coffee, or four cups of instant coffee, or six cups of tea.
- Smoking & Street Drugs- you are strongly advised to stop completely.

Current Health Status:

If you are being monitored by a specific clinic for ongoing medical conditions, ensure that they are aware of your plans and desire to conceive. Some medications might have to be stopped, so please consult your doctor. For example, if you have diabetes, epilepsy, or other medical conditions you may need special advice before becoming pregnant.

If you are trying for a baby but do not conceive after a year or so, you may wish to see your GP or family planning clinic to rule out any possible fertility problems.

Family History & Current Health:

Some medical conditions are inherited and many can be tested for. Your current health status (weight, blood pressure etc) is also important to conception, so consultation with your doctor and or midwife is recommended. You may benefit from genetic counselling.

Useful Websites & Phone Numbers

www.patient.co.uk (search pre-conception)

www.pregnancy.org

www.fpa.org.uk (Family Planning Association: 0845 310 1334)

www.bpas.org (British Pregnancy Advisory Service: 08457 304 030)