

## Preconceptual Counseling

**Women who are thinking of getting pregnant should consider preconception counseling well before stopping their current birth control.** Investment of time, energy and attention to potential problems during a pre-conception planning stage can greatly benefit both the woman and future pregnancy.

It is important for women who want to conceive to review your health history with your physician. We want to be sure you are aware of all the factors that will enable you to be a healthy pregnant person and have a healthy baby.

Unfortunately, many women begin their prenatal care in the second trimester (12 weeks gestation), which is already after the period of fetal organ formation.

### What does a preconception counseling visit include?

We recommend screening for certain medical conditions well before you are considering conception. This allows us to evaluate your risk for and potentially treat preexisting conditions that can impact your pregnancy and your baby. This workup will include a

- thorough investigation of your family history and heritage
- we will offer choices for prenatal diagnosis of multiple chromosomal and genetic disorders.
- \*\* Depending upon your family history and heritage, certain genetic testing may include screening for conditions such as cystic fibrosis, tay sachs disease, sickle cell and hemoglobinopathies/thalassemias.
- optimizing your lifestyle habits
- physical exam
- other testing which may include a pap smear, vaginal cultures, blood work
- review of your current vaccinations.
- We will also review possible medications used to treat preexisting conditions that may add to prenatal risks.

\*\* To understand more about being a *carrier* of certain genetic problems, see information in our section titled: Routine Testing about being a carrier

## Things to know

It is important to optimize and maintain a healthy lifestyle when attempting pregnancy and being pregnant. This will prepare your body to carry a pregnancy and deliver a baby.

- Avoiding tobacco, limiting alcohol, and avoiding drugs are very important.
- Caffeine intake should be limited to one or two beverages per day.
- Maintaining a normal body weight also increases fertility and decreases complications associated with pregnancy.
- Following a regular exercise program and eating a balanced diet is also beneficial.
- You should also be aware of mercury containing fish and avoid them. Mercury is cleared from your body but it can take as long as a year for this to happen.
- Vaccinations: may include tetanus, pertussis, varicella, influenza, and rubella. You should check to on your status of these vaccinations or see if you may need a booster.

## PRENATAL VITAMIN EVERYDAY

Taking a prenatal vitamin or additional folic acid (400mcg/day) for up to a year prior to conception has been shown to decrease the risk of having a child with neural tube defects such as spina bifida and anencephaly. This amount of folic acid (or folate) can be found in most over the counter prenatal vitamins. For women with a history of infants born with this condition it is recommended they take 4mgs of folic acid daily.

Many women are concerned about the impact their age will have on their ability to conceive and have a healthy baby.

- Fertility rates do decline gradually as one ages, and the likelihood of a miscarriage increases.
- Chromosomal abnormalities such as Down syndrome also increase with age.
- Older women are also more likely to have more medical problems which may impact their pregnancy, or develop problems specifically associated with pregnancy (preeclampsia or diabetes).

*However, many women over age 35 have uncomplicated pregnancies that produce healthy babies!*

## Timing of Intercourse

You are most likely to become pregnant if you have intercourse when or near when you are ovulating (when an egg is released from the ovary). Women who have regular menstrual periods at monthly intervals marked by premenstrual symptoms (PMS) and menstrual cramps are almost always ovulating.

The majority of women with a 28 day cycle will ovulate on approximately day #14 (day #1 is the first day of your period).

However, many women have cycles which are sometimes shorter or longer, and therefore may ovulate on days other than day #14.

The optimal timing of intercourse is approximately every other day, days #10-18 of the cycle. However, many women will need to expand this range, especially if they have irregular cycles.

**When do I consult the doctor if I'm having trouble getting pregnant?**

If you have been trying unsuccessfully for 12 months (6 months if you are 35 or older), you should consult your OB/GYN provider.