

Resources

First Call For Help- 211
(616.459.2255)
www.unitedwaycares.com

Child and Family Resource Council
www.childresource.cc

Healthy Kent 2010
www.healthykent.org

Kent County Health Department
www.accesskent.com

This Pamphlet was made possible by the support from:

Kent County Infant Health Initiative
Healthy Kent 2010
Strong Beginnings, federal Healthy Start

Kent County Health Department
700 Fuller NE
Grand Rapids, MI 49503
Phone: 616.632.7100



HEALTH
DEPARTMENT
Caring today for a healthy tomorrow



Plan Now



**A Guide to
Preconception
Health**

What is Preconception Health?

Preconception health is the state of a woman's health anytime during childbearing years. Nearly half of all pregnancies are unplanned, so it is important to begin taking care of your health now.

If you already have a child, the time between pregnancies is called "interconception". Studies have shown that spacing pregnancies between 18 months to 5 years apart will result in a healthier pregnancy and, quite possibly, a healthier baby.

Why is Preconception Health Important?

You probably won't know you are pregnant for the first 3 to 4 weeks. By then, your baby is already forming major organs and structures. Some medicines, illnesses, or unhealthy behaviors (like smoking or drinking alcohol) can affect your baby before you even know you are pregnant. Taking care of yourself now can prevent problems to your baby later.

Readiness for Pregnancy

Goals:

Having a child can bring many changes to your life. Think about your life goals, including education and career plans. How will having children fit into plan? Do you have adequate support? Are you emotionally ready for this change?

Financial:

Having and raising children is very expensive. Before having children consider your financial situation. Consider how you will pay for medical care, clothes, diapers, food, crib, car seat, childcare, and many other costs that add up.



Environment:

Before you get pregnant, identify hazards in your home and your work environment, such as lead, chemicals, and pesticides. These substances may be harmful to a developing baby.

Substance Use



Smoking:

Smoking and exposure to smoke is very harmful to your baby. It can cause problems such as miscarriage, prematurity, low birth weight, and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).

Alcohol:

Alcohol (including beer, wine, and wine coolers) can affect your baby's development in the very first weeks, even before you know you are pregnant. Alcohol has been related to mental retardation, heart defects, miscarriage, and low birth weight. No level of alcohol during pregnancy is safe. Stop drinking *before* you try to get pregnant.

Other Drugs:

Using drugs, even marijuana, may cause miscarriage, low birth weight, mental retardation, and irritability in newborns.

******Stop drinking or using drugs if there is any possibility you might get pregnant. If you need help stopping any of these substances, please contact your health care provider.

Folic Acid/Nutrition:

Get your body ready for pregnancy. Women need plenty of folic acid *before* they get pregnant. This nutrient helps prevent birth defects of the brain and spine. It is found in leafy green vegetables, citrus fruits, and is added to many cereals. It is recommended that women in their childbearing years take 400 mcg of folic acid daily, either alone or in a multivitamin. Women that eat healthy and are at a healthy weight when they get pregnant improve their chances of having a healthy pregnancy. To eat healthy you must eat a variety of foods every day including:

- Milk and other dairy ~ 3 servings
- Protein foods, such as meat, fish, eggs, and dried beans ~ 2 to 3 servings
- Fruits ~ 3 servings
- Vegetables ~ 4 servings
- Breads, cereals, rice and pasta ~ 9 to 11 servings

It also means limiting junk food and foods high in fat and sugar. And don't forget to drink plenty of water, 8 glasses per day.



Medical Conditions:

It is important to have regular check-ups with a health care provider. Untreated conditions like high blood pressure, diabetes, and asthma can increase your risks for stillbirth, miscarriage, or a preterm birth. Talk to your health care provider about the medications you are taking. While some medications and herbal remedies may be unsafe for a developing baby, you should never stop or change your medications without your health care provider's advice.

Dental:

Dental problems with cavities and gums can cause infections that cause miscarriage and babies being born too early. Take care of your teeth- brush them twice a day, floss daily, and see a dentist.

Immunizations:

Now is a good time to bring your immunizations up to date. Some vaccines require waiting three months before trying to get pregnant. Immunizations are important because some preventable diseases can cause birth defects.



Sleep:

Make sure you are getting adequate sleep and rest. It is recommended that you get 7 to 8 hours of sleep per night.

Exercise/Healthy Weight:

Regular moderate exercise is recommended while trying to conceive. Being over or under weight increases risks during pregnancy.



Stress Management:

Having a baby can add stress to your life. If you are thinking of getting pregnant, it is important to keep your life in balance. This includes having a support system, like friends and family, and taking care of yourself by doing things you enjoy that keep you healthy.

Family Planning:

If you don't want to have a baby right now, there are many methods available to prevent pregnancy—from pills that you take everyday to shots that last 3 months to IUDs that last 5 years. Talk to your health care provider about what method is best for you. Emergency birth control (the morning after pill) is also available. This must be taken within 5 days of unprotected sex (72 hours is best). Ask for it at your local pharmacy or at Planned Parenthood.

Safe Sex:

Some sexually transmitted diseases can cause harm to your baby. Be sure to tell your health care provider if you or your partner have or have had a sexually transmitted disease. Now is the time to start practicing safe sex habits.