

Importance of Prenatal Care

Now, more than ever, your health will be important to you. Your baby's growth and progress can be affected by how well you take care of yourself. It is a good idea to plan ahead. It is a known fact that women who receive care early and throughout their pregnancy have healthier babies.

Good Prenatal Care Includes:

- Good nutrition and health habits before and during pregnancy.
- Frequent prenatal examinations to detect early problems.
- Routine ultrasounds to detect fetal abnormalities and problems.
- Routine screening for:
 - Sexually transmitted diseases.
 - Rubella immunity.
 - Blood type problems (Rh and ABO).
 - Diabetes.
 - Genetic disorders — if there is a family history or the age of the mother indicates the need.
 - Blood pressure abnormalities.
 - Urine proteins.

The Goals of Prenatal Care are to:

- Monitor both the pregnant woman and the fetus throughout the pregnancy.
- Identify anything that could change the outlook for the pregnancy from normal to high-risk.
- Explain nutritional requirements throughout the pregnancy and postpartum period.
- Explain activity recommendations or restrictions.
- Address common complaints that may arise during pregnancy (for example, backache, joint pain, nausea, heartburn, headaches, urinary frequency, leg cramps and constipation) and how to manage them, preferably without medications.

Women who are considering becoming pregnant, or who are pregnant, should eat a balanced diet and take a vitamin and mineral supplement that includes at least 0.4 milligrams (400 micrograms) of folic acid. This level of folic acid supplement has been shown to decrease the risk of certain abnormalities (such as spina bifida) to your baby.

Pregnant women are advised to avoid all medications, unless the medications are necessary and recommended by a prenatal health care provider. Women should discuss all medication use with their health care providers. Pregnant women should avoid all alcohol and drug use. They should avoid herbal preparations and common over-the-counter medications that may interfere with normal development of the fetus.

Pregnant women should not smoke. Cigarettes contain chemicals that are harmful to babies. Smoking tightens blood vessels, which decreases the supply of oxygen and nutrients the baby receives. Smoking increases the risk of miscarriage, low birth weight babies and premature babies.

PRENATAL VISITS TO YOUR DOCTOR

- Every four weeks during the first 28 weeks of gestation.
- Every two weeks from 28 to 36 weeks gestation.
- Weekly from 36 weeks to delivery.

It is important to keep your appointments and follow directions for your care. The number of visits will be decided by your doctor. Don't be afraid to ask questions. Talk with your nurses and doctors about your plans for birth and any concerns that you may have.

What to Typically Expect on Your First Visit:

- You will be asked to give some information about your medical history, your family medical history and your partner's medical history. This is to help the staff caring for you to give you the best type of care.
- You will be weighed. Your urine and blood pressure will be checked.
- Blood tests will be done. Blood tests are done to check for some of the following:
 - Anemia (the blood's ability to carry oxygen).
 - German measles.
 - Rh factor (part of your blood type).
 - Sexually transmitted diseases.
 - Hepatitis B.
 - Blood sugar ranges.
 - HIV.
 - Cystic fibrosis.

What to Typically Expect at Your Second Visit:

Your doctor will do a complete physical for you. The physical will include an internal exam (pelvic) and may include a Pap smear and vaginal cultures to look for infection.

What to Typically Expect at Your Next Visits:

- Your urine will be checked.
- You will be weighed.
- Your blood pressure will be checked.
- Your baby's growth and heart beat will be checked.

What to Typically Expect at Your 28th Week of Pregnancy Visit:

- You will be given a slip to have blood tests done. It will take at least one hour to have your blood work completed. Blood tests to be performed are:
 - A test for diabetes.
 - A test for anemia.
 - Other tests may be included as your doctor sees fit.

What to Typically Expect at Your 35th Week of Pregnancy Visit:

- A vaginal swab may be taken to test for Group B strep. If it is positive, you will need IV antibiotics when in labor.
- A cervical exam may be done to check if your cervix is opening or becoming thinner.

Information and counseling: Will be available throughout your pregnancy.

Please feel free to ask at any visit.

- Nutrition and diet.
- Dental care.
- Exercise.
- Avoiding drugs, alcohol, caffeine, smoking, raw meat and handling cat litter.
- Growth of your baby.
- Cord blood sampling.
- Body changes during pregnancy.
- Ultrasound at 18 to 20 weeks.
- Mercury/fish warning
- Ways to lessen discomfort.
- Emotional support.
- Community resources.
- Sex during pregnancy.
- Seatbelt use.
- Breastfeeding or bottle-feeding.
- Signs/symptoms of problems during pregnancy.
- Childbirth/parenting education classes.
- Travel limits.