

Early Pregnancy Advice

An information guide



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Key Messages

- Take folic acid ideally 3 months before you become pregnant and until you are 12 weeks pregnant
- Stop smoking! Stopping smoking at any point in your pregnancy will benefit you and your baby
- Avoid alcohol - In pregnancy, no alcohol = no risk of harm to your baby
- Eat a healthy balanced diet - remember it is a myth that you are eating for two.

Now that you are pregnant, you will probably be asking lots of questions. So here is some general advice on healthcare in pregnancy, to ensure a healthy pregnancy and baby.

Folic acid

Folic acid is beneficial during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy, when a great deal of organ and skeletal growth occurs. Folic acid helps to reduce the risk of a type of birth defect, such as spina bifida. You can get a prescription from your doctor or you can buy it from chemists and some supermarkets.

Look at your diet for foods that are rich in folic acid, for example, orange juice, sprouts, broccoli, marmite and fortified breakfast cereals. The recommended daily dose is 0.4mg or 400micrograms (a higher dose of 5mg is required if you have diabetes, epilepsy or a BMI over 30).

Smoking

Congratulations if you have recently stopped smoking. However, if you have not managed to stop so far, it is not too late - stopping smoking at any point will benefit you and your baby.

Stopping smoking is the most important thing you can do to improve your health and give your baby the best start in life. If you are pregnant, or planning to become pregnant, we strongly advise you to stop.

Every cigarette causes damage to both the mum-to-be and her baby. The only way to prevent this is to stop smoking completely.

Cigarette smoke contains over 4000 chemicals; these chemicals pass into the mother's bloodstream. The blood then moves around their body until it passes through the placenta and the umbilical cord into the baby's bloodstream which means every time the mother smokes, these chemicals are passed directly onto the baby.

The good news is: that the effects of stopping smoking can be seen immediately; the carbon monoxide and chemicals will clear from your body, your oxygen levels will return to normal and this will benefit you and your baby.

Your midwife will monitor your carbon monoxide levels at your first antenatal visit, and discuss further support.

Smoking during pregnancy can reduce the growth of your baby as the blood supply through the placenta is reduced, which in turn reduces oxygen and nutrients to your baby. It also increases the risk of miscarriage, stillbirth and sudden infant death syndrome (cot death).

If your partner smokes it not only affects their health but the health of you and your baby. You could find it much more difficult to quit yourself if your partner smokes. Regular exposure to second hand smoke increases the risk of miscarriage. For more information to help your partner quit visit www.nhs.uk/smokefree.

Electronic cigarettes or E-cigarettes

The risks to the unborn baby during pregnancy when mothers use an e-cigarette are not well researched. This means that it is unclear

if e-cigarettes are safe to use. There are fewer chemicals in e-cigarettes and they do not contain carbon monoxide which is harmful to the unborn baby. However, e-cigarettes are not currently regulated in the UK so the full list of chemicals they contain is unclear. If you would like to stop using an e-cigarette please ask your midwife for details of your local stop smoking service. This is because it is recommended using Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT) rather than an e-cigarette during pregnancy. Alternatively you can get support from the NHS stop smoking service by phoning 0300 1231044 or from www.nhs.uk/smokefree.

Ask your midwife about what help and support is available for stopping smoking for good. Help is also available from your local Stop Smoking Service, from the NHS Pregnancy Smoking Helpline 0800 1699169 and from www.nhs.uk/smokefree.

Do I need to take vitamin tablets during my pregnancy?

Most people with a normal healthy diet should not need to take supplements. Try to eat the recommended five portions of fruit and vegetables daily.

Why have I been advised to take Vitamin D supplements?

A significant number of women in the UK have a low vitamin D level which has resulted in a rising number of cases of bone deformity (rickets) in children.

Vitamin D is present in oily fish, eggs, fortified margarine and breakfast cereals, but our main source of vitamin D is sunlight. Vitamin D deficiency is more common in women of Asian, African-Caribbean or Middle Eastern origin, and anyone who may get inadequate exposure to sunlight.

It is therefore recommended that all pregnant and breastfeeding women take a Vitamin D supplement of 10mcg. daily. For more information ask your midwife or go to www.healthystart.nhs.uk

Taking iron tablets

There is no need to take extra iron during pregnancy. However, we will check your blood during pregnancy to make sure you have enough iron. Again make sure your diet includes good sources of iron, which are green vegetables, like broccoli, red meat, or breakfast cereals which have iron added (check the label). Cutting down on tea and coffee consumption may help with the absorption of iron from your diet. If you are prescribed iron tablets take them with orange juice, as Vitamin C helps with the absorption of iron, rather than tea or coffee. If you are vegetarian you can get extra iron from beans and pulses.

Caffeine

It is now known that excessive amounts of caffeine can be harmful. Women who are pregnant should limit their caffeine intake to 200mg day (approximately two cups of instant coffee). Caffeine is present in a variety of foods and drinks including tea, coffee, cola, energy drinks and chocolate.

Alcohol

Alcohol should be avoided. In pregnancy alcohol passes directly through to your baby. If taken in excess, for example when binge drinking occurs, it can have permanent effects on developing organs like the brain. There is a recognised condition known as Fetal Alcohol Syndrome where the baby is quite markedly affected and may have some facial abnormalities and learning difficulties in later life.

Avoid food poisoning

Salmonella

Make sure that before and after preparing foods such as raw meat and chicken that you wash your hands thoroughly and clean all surfaces and equipment. Whilst you are pregnant it is now safe to eat raw, soft boiled or foods containing slightly cooked hen eggs

only. These hen eggs must also be produced under the lion-coded quality assurance scheme. Check that either the egg or the box is stamped with a lion-mark. Make sure that duck or quail eggs are cooked thoroughly before you eat them.

E-coli

E-coli is another organism that can live happily inside parts of the body. If allowed to contaminate food, it can be responsible for food poisoning, so as above, be thorough about hygiene. Also be careful at barbeques, by making sure your food is thoroughly cooked, and avoid anything that is bloody.

Listeria

Cheese and milk are valuable sources of calcium which form an important part of a healthy diet during pregnancy; however, some cheeses can contain listeria which can cause a serious illness in pregnancy. Blue-veined cheese such as Danish blue and blue stilton should be avoided, as well as soft cheeses like camembert and brie. If cheese is pasteurised it is safe to eat. Ordinary cheeses like cheddar and commercially produced cheese such as Philadelphia are therefore safe to eat. Listeria can also be present in ready cooked foods that have not been heated thoroughly. Follow re-heating instructions carefully. Pate may also be a source of listeria, so avoid any kind of pate – including vegetable pate.

Toxoplasmosis

Toxoplasmosis is an infection caused by a parasite found in cat litter, so be careful when removing cat litter and any excreta from the garden. Wear gloves and always wash your hands. Also ensure things like children's sandpits are covered, and if your cat is sick let someone else care for it. This parasitic infection can also be caught by eating raw or undercooked meat and also cured meat like Parma and prosciutto ham. Unpasteurised goat's milk or goat's cheese may also carry the infection. Always ensure raw vegetables and salads are carefully washed and the soil removed from them

because of the risk of toxoplasmosis. There is a similar infection carried by lambs. If you live on a farm, then do not help with lambing or handle newborn lambs.

Some commonly asked questions

Can I smoke cannabis during pregnancy?

Using cannabis during pregnancy may increase the risk of birth defects and miscarriage, and, like tobacco smoking, cannabis smoking seems to increase the risk of sudden infant death syndrome and reduced fetal growth. There is also an increased risk of depression, and a decrease in energy and motivation for you. If you need help or advice on any drug-related problems, speak with your midwife.

Can I exercise whilst pregnant?

Yes, it is good for you, especially walking or swimming. You should avoid any strenuous high impact exercises. Contact sports and scuba diving are not recommended. You should remember that in pregnancy a hormone called progesterone is produced, which softens ligaments. Therefore, be careful if attending a gym and let the instructor know that you are pregnant.

Aqua-natal classes are available at many local swimming baths. Contact your community midwife for further information.

I got pregnant whilst taking the contraceptive pill (or emergency contraceptive pill). Will this affect my baby?

There is no need to worry. Obviously you must stop taking the pill when you know you are pregnant but it is not known to cause any damage to the baby.

Do I need to worry if I have been in contact with German measles/measles/chicken pox?

Most women acquire a natural immunity as a child to these infections. If you know you had any of these infections when you

were young, you will have made antibodies that will protect your unborn baby.

Chicken pox

However if you come into contact with chicken pox whilst you are pregnant and you think that you have never had this infection in the past then you should inform your midwife immediately who will take a blood test from you to check whether an injection of immunoglobulin is needed to protect your unborn baby.

Do not attend your GP surgery/clinic in person if you have a rash. You must ring first.

German measles/measles

In the UK cases of rubella (German measles) and measles are rare due to the MMR (measles, mumps and rubella) vaccination programme. If you catch rubella or measles during pregnancy it can be passed onto your baby, which can be very damaging. It is therefore important to have the MMR vaccine before you become pregnant. Immunity to rubella is checked as a routine blood test at the antenatal booking clinic. If you are not immune then the MMR vaccine will be offered to you after your baby is born before you go home from hospital or arranged via your GP if you have your baby at home. To ensure you are protected from measles infection you should make sure that you have had two doses of MMR at some time in your life. Your GP can check your health records for this and arrange a vaccination if necessary.

Do I need a flu vaccination?

Pregnant women are encouraged to have the flu vaccination between September and March each year. The viruses that cause flu change every year, so the vaccine you need to protect you will be different. Please contact your GP or ask at the antenatal clinic at the hospital for the flu vaccination.

Do I need a whooping cough vaccination?

Young babies are particularly at risk of disease and they remain vulnerable until they can be vaccinated against whooping cough from two months of age. You can help protect your unborn child from getting whooping cough in its first weeks after birth by having the whooping cough vaccination whilst you are pregnant. You should have the vaccination even if you've been vaccinated before or have had whooping cough. The best time to get vaccinated is from 16 weeks. This is usually done at the GP, please contact them to make an arrangement.

Is flying safe in pregnancy?

The risk of blood clots is increased in pregnancy, especially for women with a raised BMI, but it is unclear how the risk is affected by flying. You should take sensible precautions such as taking regular walks around the plane, exercising your ankles and calves, and drinking plenty of water. If the flight is longer than 4 hours you should buy and use pressure stockings from the chemist.

Due to the risk of in-flight delivery most airlines prohibit travel after the end of the 36th week, for some it is 34 weeks. If you are having a multiple pregnancy, or you have previously had a premature birth this is reduced to 32 weeks. Please check with your individual airline. Most airlines will need confirmation of dates when travelling between 28-36 weeks and verification that you are 'Fit to Fly'. Please contact your GP if your airline requires a letter.

Can pregnant women have the injections for some holiday destinations?

Care must be taken to ensure that any vaccines needed are safe in pregnancy. In general, killed or inactivated vaccines can be given – but you must consult with your GP and ensure he or she is aware of your pregnancy before you have any vaccinations. Also ensure that your GP is aware of your pregnancy if prescribing anti-malarial

drugs for you before a holiday as only certain brands of these drugs can safely be taken in early pregnancy.

Can I dye my hair whilst I am pregnant?

There is no evidence to suggest that colouring your hair during pregnancy is harmful to your baby. But be aware that dye may react differently with your skin and hair than it did before you became pregnant.

Can I go on the sun bed in pregnancy?

Sun beds are not advised during early pregnancy, although there is no evidence to say whether they are safe or unsafe. Pregnant women do experience skin changes and some women develop brown patches over their face known as Chloasma, which is highly sensitive to the sun.

Can I use fake tan creams during pregnancy?

Yes. Fake tans stain the upper layer of the skin within 1-2 hours and are not considered to be dangerous in pregnancy.

Can I use the sauna or jacuzzi?

It is advisable to avoid the sauna and jacuzzi because of the risks of overheating, dehydration and fainting.

Can I take painkillers during pregnancy?

Paracetamol is the only painkiller you can take without consulting your doctor.

Can I have my belly button pierced during pregnancy?

It is not a very good idea. Apart from the fact that you may be putting yourself at risk from blood-borne infections, it may cause scarring. If you already have a pierced belly button, remove it early so that the stretching does not result in a scar.

What can I take to help relieve early morning sickness?

Make sure you do not get too hungry. Eat small amounts of food often and avoid fatty foods. Ginger is also thought to help, for example ginger biscuits and ginger ale. 'Sea bands' are simply wristbands, which apply pressure to the pressure points in the wrist and may alleviate nausea. Most women get through this time without any need for medication. However in severe cases there are drugs we can prescribe, but only when absolutely necessary.

Can I have sexual intercourse in early pregnancy?

Yes. There is no physical reason why women with a normal pregnancy shouldn't continue to have sex. However, if you have had any bleeding, or if you have had a previous premature birth then please ask your doctor or midwife for advice.

Do I need to wear a seatbelt during pregnancy?

Yes all pregnant women must wear seatbelts by law when travelling in cars. The safest way for a pregnant woman to wear a seat belt is to:

- Place the seat belt above and below the bump - not over it
- Use a three point seat belt with the lap strap placed as low as possible beneath the bump, lying across the thighs with the diagonal shoulder strap above the bump
- Adjust the fit to be as snug as comfortably possible.

Can I have a tattoo whilst I am pregnant?

This is not advised due to the hormone changes that occur which can affect the skin and make it more sensitive. There is also a risk of infection. The advice is to wait until after you have had your baby.

Further information.

You can find more information from your doctor or midwife - or by accessing the NHS choices website.

GENERAL FOOD ADVICE

Eating for a healthy pregnancy

It is important that you get a good balance of foods to supply you and your baby with the right nutrients while you are pregnant. Weight gain in pregnancy varies greatly but putting on too much weight can lead to problems for you and your baby in pregnancy, labour and after birth. We do not advise weight loss in pregnancy and your midwife can give you advice on healthy eating. Your GP can refer you to a local weight management team if your body mass index is 30 or more at booking.

A Guide to Healthy Weight Gain in Pregnancy

It is normal to gain some weight during pregnancy, but not too much as this could affect the health of both you and your baby. Healthy weight gain can be achieved by following a healthy balanced diet that includes a wide variety of foods in the correct amounts combined with regular exercise.

Follow the guidelines below to help you to maintain a healthy weight throughout your pregnancy.

Follow a regular meal pattern - breakfast, lunch and evening meal. Choose healthy snacks in between meals if needed.

Include some starchy carbohydrates at every meal such as bread, potatoes, rice, pasta, cereal, couscous, noodles, pittas, and chapattis, preferably wholegrain varieties. These will provide energy for you and your baby.

Aim to have at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables per day as they are rich in vitamins, minerals and fibre. Fruits and vegetables high in vitamin C may help you absorb iron when taken with meals, for example citrus fruits, blackcurrants, tomatoes, broccoli and some pure fruit juices.

Have 2-3 servings per day of protein foods such as lean meats, poultry, fish, eggs, beans, lentils, soya, Quorn and tofu. These foods are essential for the growth of you and your baby. They contain iron which ensures healthy iron levels. Remove visible fat from meat and poultry and grill, bake, or poach these foods rather than cooking with fat. Try to have oily fish in your diet, e.g. salmon, mackerel and sardines - but have no more than 2 portions per week. Oily fish can help your baby to develop a healthy brain and nervous system.

Have 2-3 servings per day of low-fat dairy products e.g. skimmed or semi-skimmed milk, low fat yoghurt, low-fat cottage cheese and reduced fat cheeses. Dairy products provide calcium and vitamin D which are essential for building strong bones and teeth. Dairy foods can be high in fat so choose low-fat or light types as often as you can.

Stay well hydrated. Aim to drink around 8 glasses of fluid per day. Coffee, tea and cola are best consumed in moderation (no more than 200 milligrams of caffeine per day - this is equivalent to 1 - 2 cups of coffee per day or 2 mugs of tea). Try decaffeinated tea or coffee or a glass of low-fat milk instead.

Take 400 micrograms of folic acid each day in the first trimester.

Include foods high in folic acid, such as yeast extract, spinach, broccoli, brussel sprouts, asparagus, parsnips, peas, chickpeas, brown rice, black-eyed beans, baked beans, fortified breakfast cereals and breads. Check the label to see if they contain folic acid. Taking folic acid can prevent your baby from developing neural tube defects such as spina bifida. Some women will need a higher dose of 5mg/day, speak to your midwife about this.

Get plenty of vitamin D. Ensuring you get some daily sunlight is the ideal way to get vitamin D. In addition include foods high in vitamin D in your diet such as eggs, low-fat milk, low-fat margarine,

fortified cereals, and oily fish. Vitamin D will help make strong bones and protect your baby against rickets.

Speak with your midwife about taking the Healthy Start vitamin daily, throughout your pregnancy and after delivery. You may be eligible to get this through the Healthy Start scheme.

If you need further information or support, contact your midwife or GP.

Vegetarian/vegan diet

Vitamin B12 is essential for the formation of red blood cells and a healthy nervous system. It is mainly found in foods of animal origin e.g. fish, meats, dairy, eggs. Women following a vegetarian or vegan diet should eat foods fortified with vitamin B12 or ask their doctor for a prescribed supplement that is safe in pregnancy.

Fish

The advice for the general population is to eat at least two portions of fish per week, one of which should be oily fish (eg salmon, trout or mackerel). This is because fish, particularly oily fish, has significant health benefits. However there are limitations for pregnant women on the amount and type of fish they should eat. For example, they should not eat more than two portions per week of oily fish, due to the risk of exposure to pollutants. Pregnant women should also be advised to avoid shark and swordfish, due to the risk of exposure to mercury, and limit the intake of tuna to no more than two portions of fresh tuna or four medium sized cans per week.

Liver

Liver pate and liver products such as liver sausage, contain excessive amounts of vitamin A which can be harmful to your unborn baby so these should be avoided.

Peanuts

The advice about eating peanuts during pregnancy and breastfeeding has recently changed. If mothers would like to eat peanuts, or foods containing peanuts, during pregnancy or whilst breastfeeding, then they can choose to do so as part of a healthy balanced diet, irrespective of whether they have a family history or allergies.

Further Information

You can find more information on all aspects of your pregnancy from your doctor or midwife - or by accessing the NHS choices website which is a free online information service for parents with information and resources about pregnancy and babies www.nhs.uk

If English is not your first language and you need help, please contact the Interpretation and Translation Service

Jeśli angielski nie jest twoim pierwszym językiem i potrzebujesz pomocy, skontaktuj się z działem tłumaczeń ustnych i pisemnych

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For advice on stopping smoking contact the Specialist Stop Smoking Service on 01706 517 522

For general enquiries please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 0161 604 5897

For enquiries regarding clinic appointments, clinical care and treatment please contact 0161 624 0420 and the Switchboard Operator will put you through to the correct department / service

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