



women's  
health clinic

## **Preconception care: Before you get pregnant**

Most people know about how important early pre-natal care is in pregnancy. However, many women don't find out that they are pregnant right away, and a lot of fetal development happens early pregnancy. There are things you can do before you get pregnant to improve your chances of a healthy pregnancy.

### **Health Care:**

Tell your health care provider you are planning to get pregnant. There are medical tests that may be done, like tests for anemia (the level of iron in your blood), immunity to certain diseases like Rubella and chicken pox, and screening for diseases like tuberculosis. If you have any pre-existing medical conditions such as heart disease, diabetes or kidney disease you may need special care before a pregnancy. Your family health history will also be reviewed to determine if you might need information on genetic counselling.

### **Nutrition:**

Eat a balanced diet based on Canada's Food Guide (available from your health care provider, or on-line at [www.hc-sc.gc.ca](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca) ). Getting enough calcium, iron and vitamins through foods can be difficult, so it's suggested to take a multivitamin with Folic acid (0.4-1 mg). Folic acid has been found to prevent certain birth defects. Avoid caffeine and artificial sweeteners which can cause birth defects or miscarriages. Being as healthy as possible when you get pregnant will improve your chances of having a healthy baby.

### **Alcohol/Tobacco/Drugs:**

All have been proven to be harmful during pregnancy. It is safest not to use any tobacco, drugs or alcohol during preconception or pregnancy. Ask for support from your health care provider if you need help to stop.

### **Medications:**

Ask your health care provider or pharmacist about any medications you are currently taking to find out if they are safe during pregnancy or if there are safer alternatives. Let any health care provider you see that you are trying to get pregnant so that if you need medication, they prescribe ones that are safe to take during pregnancy. Some over-the-counter medications or large doses of vitamins can also be harmful during pregnancy. If you take birth control pills, stop them for one month before trying to conceive and use an alternative birth control method (like condoms) during the month.

**Exercise:**

If you exercise on a regular basis continue to do so, but avoid overdoing it. Intensive exercise may cause excessive body heat and/or infertility. A general guideline is that if you are too short of breath to carry on a conversation, then you are working too hard. If you want to become more active, it's a good idea to start exercising before getting pregnant so that your body is used to it by the time you conceive. Avoid overheating in hot tubs and saunas. Wear appropriate safety equipment for any activities you do.

**Work and Hobbies:**

Avoid exposures to gases, fumes or other toxic substances that may be harmful. Use available safety equipment. Your workplace is required to have information about all chemicals you may come in contact with.

**Men intending to father a child:**

It's a good idea for you to get a complete physical exam at this time as well. Less is known about the health effects on the fetus from the man and his sperm development. However, it is suggested that you avoid toxic exposure from drugs, tobacco, and infectious diseases for at least three months prior to conception. You can also support the woman involved to take healthy steps listed above.

**Disclaimer:** WHC provides health information for your learning only. It should not be used to replace a visit with a health care provider.

© Women's Health Clinic, June 2011

MP:sy