

Learning About Pregnancy



Your Care Instructions

Your health in the early weeks of your pregnancy is particularly important for your baby's health. Take good care of yourself. Anything you do that harms your body can also harm your baby.

Make sure to go to all of your doctor appointments. Regular checkups will help keep you and your baby healthy.

How can you care for yourself at home?

Diet

- Eat a balanced diet. Make sure your diet includes plenty of beans, peas, and leafy green vegetables.
- Do not skip meals or go for many hours without eating. If you are nauseated, try to eat a small, healthy snack every 2 to 3 hours.
- Do not eat fish that has a high level of mercury, such as shark, swordfish, or mackerel. Do not eat more than one can of tuna each week.
- Drink plenty of fluids, enough so that your urine is light yellow or clear like water. If you have kidney, heart, or liver disease and have to limit fluids, talk with your doctor before you increase the amount of fluids you drink.
- Cut down on caffeine, such as coffee, tea, and cola.
- Do not drink alcohol, such as beer, wine, or hard liquor.
- Take a multivitamin that contains at least 400 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid to help prevent birth defects. Fortified cereal and whole wheat bread are good additional sources of folic acid.
- Increase the calcium in your diet. Try to drink a quart of skim milk each day. You may also take calcium supplements and choose foods such as cheese and yogurt.

Lifestyle

- Make sure you go to your follow-up appointments.
- Get plenty of rest. You may be unusually tired while you are pregnant.
- Get at least 30 minutes of exercise on most days of the week. Walking is a good choice. If you have not exercised in the past, start out slowly. Take several short walks each day.
- Do not smoke. If you need help quitting, talk to your doctor about stop-smoking programs. These can increase your chances of quitting for good.
- Do not touch cat feces or litter boxes. Also, wash your hands after you handle raw meat, and fully cook all meat before you eat it. Wear gloves when you work in the yard or garden, and wash your hands well when you are done. Cat feces, raw or undercooked meat, and contaminated dirt can cause an infection that may harm your baby or lead to a miscarriage.
- Do not use saunas or hot tubs. Raising your body temperature may harm your baby.
- Avoid chemical fumes, paint fumes, or poisons.
- Do not use illegal drugs or alcohol.

Medicines

- Review all of your medicines with your doctor. Some of your routine medicines may need to be changed to protect your baby.
- Use acetaminophen (Tylenol) to relieve minor problems, such as a mild headache or backache or a mild fever with cold symptoms. Do not use nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) or naproxen (Aleve), unless your doctor says it is okay.

- Do not take two or more pain medicines at the same time unless the doctor told you to. Many pain medicines have acetaminophen, which is Tylenol. Too much acetaminophen (Tylenol) can be harmful.
- Take your medicines exactly as prescribed. Call your doctor if you think you are having a problem with your medicine.

To manage morning sickness

- If you feel sick when you first wake up, try eating a small snack (such as crackers) before you get out of bed. Allow some time to digest the snack, and then get out of bed slowly.
- Do not skip meals or go for long periods without eating. An empty stomach can make nausea worse.
- Eat small, frequent meals instead of three large meals each day.
- Drink plenty of fluids. Sports drinks, such as Gatorade or Powerade, are good choices.
- Eat foods that are high in protein but low in fat.
- If you are taking iron supplements, ask your doctor if they are necessary. Iron can make nausea worse.
- Avoid any smells, such as coffee, that make you feel sick.
- Get lots of rest. Morning sickness may be worse when you are tired.

Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety. Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

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