

Pregnancy Precautions: Care Instructions



Your Care Instructions

There is no sure way to prevent labor before your due date (preterm labor) or to prevent most other pregnancy problems. But there are things you can do to increase your chances of a healthy pregnancy. Go to your appointments, follow your doctor's advice, and take good care of yourself. Eat well, and exercise (if your doctor agrees). And make sure to drink plenty of water.

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.

How can you care for yourself at home?

- Make sure you go to your prenatal appointments. At each visit, your doctor will check your blood pressure. Your doctor will also check to see if you have protein in your urine. High blood pressure and protein in urine are signs of preeclampsia. This condition can be dangerous for you and your baby.
- Drink plenty of fluids, enough so that your urine is light yellow or clear like water. Dehydration can cause contractions. 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.
- Tell your doctor right away if you notice any symptoms of an infection, such as:
 - Burning when you urinate.
 - A foul-smelling discharge from your vagina.
 - Vaginal itching.
 - Unexplained fever.
 - Unusual pain or soreness in your uterus or lower belly.
- Eat a balanced diet. Include plenty of foods that are high in calcium and iron.
 - Foods high in calcium include milk, cheese, yogurt, almonds, and broccoli.
 - Foods high in iron include red meat, shellfish, poultry, eggs, beans, raisins, whole-grain bread, and leafy green vegetables.
- Do not smoke. If you need help quitting, talk to your doctor about stop-smoking programs and medicines. These can increase your chances of quitting for good.
- Do not drink alcohol or use illegal drugs.
- Follow your doctor's directions about activity. Your doctor will let you know how much, if any, exercise you can do.
- Ask your doctor if you can have sex. If you are at risk for early labor, your doctor may ask you to not have sex.
- Take care to prevent falls. During pregnancy, your joints are loose, and your balance is off. Sports such as bicycling, skiing, or in-line skating can increase your risk of falling. And don't ride horses or motorcycles, dive, water ski, scuba dive, or parachute jump while you are pregnant.
- Avoid getting very hot. Do not use saunas or hot tubs. Avoid staying out in the sun in hot weather for long periods. Take acetaminophen (Tylenol) to lower a high fever.
- Do not take any over-the-counter or herbal medicines or supplements without talking to your doctor or pharmacist first.

When should you call for help?

Call anytime you think you may need emergency care. For example, call if:

- You passed out (lost consciousness).
- You have a seizure.
- You have severe vaginal bleeding.
- You have severe pain in your belly or pelvis.
- You have had fluid gushing or leaking from your vagina **and** you know or think the umbilical cord is bulging into your vagina.

If this happens, immediately get down on your knees so your rear end (buttocks) is higher than your head. This will decrease the pressure on the cord until help arrives.

Call your doctor now or seek immediate medical care if:

- You have signs of preeclampsia, such as:
 - Sudden swelling of your face, hands, or feet.
 - New vision problems (such as dimness, blurring, or seeing spots).
 - A severe headache.
- You have any vaginal bleeding.
- You have belly pain or cramping.
- You have a fever.
- You have had regular contractions (with or without pain) for an hour. This means that you have 8 or more within 1 hour or 4 or more in 20 minutes after you change your position and drink fluids.
- You have a sudden release of fluid from your vagina.
- You have low back pain or pelvic pressure that does not go away.
- You notice that your baby has stopped moving or is moving much less than normal.

Watch closely for changes in your health, and be sure to contact your doctor if you have any problems.

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