

## PREPARING FOR PREGNANCY

### Have a Well-Woman Exam

A pre-pregnancy health exam is important to assess for any health conditions that may interfere with becoming pregnant or affect your pregnancy.

- Important screening tests include a recent pap smear, blood pressure check, and test for anemia.
- Assess for any needed vaccines, especially measles, mumps, rubella, tetanus, diphtheria, polio and chicken pox (varicella). Get any necessary vaccines more than a month prior to becoming pregnant.
- Check for any infections that could affect your pregnancy, such as HIV, hepatitis, herpes simplex virus, or other sexually transmitted infections.
- Review your family history and your partner's family history for any possible genetic conditions that may affect your child, such as cystic fibrosis, sickle cell disease, and muscular dystrophy. Consider genetic carrier screening.
- If you experience irregular or painful periods, a proper assessment is needed to rule out any hormonal imbalances or gynecological problems that could make getting pregnant or maintaining a pregnancy difficult.

### Achieve a Healthy Weight

A healthy body mass index (BMI) is between 19 and 25. Your fertility may be affected if you are underweight or overweight. Achieving an optimal weight will increase your chances of becoming pregnant and lead to a healthy pregnancy.

### Optimize Nutrition, Exercise & Healthy Living

A healthy lifestyle is important when preparing your body for pregnancy and for preventing pregnancy complications.

- Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables. Choose wholegrain food products over processed carbohydrates. Choose healthy sources of fats and lean meats.
- Start taking a prenatal vitamin prior to becoming pregnant. Make sure you are getting 800-1000mcg of folic acid each day to prevent neural tube defects.
- If you take any medications or herbal supplements, discuss these with your provider to check for safety during pregnancy.
- Avoid foods that carry an increased risk of contamination with listeria and toxoplasmosis, such as raw meat, un-pasteurized milk and cheeses, and raw seafood.
- Exercise for 30 minutes or more on most days of the week, and include both cardio and muscle training in your routine.
- Reduce alcohol intake and avoid binge drinking.
- Avoid excessive caffeine intake. Caffeine in moderation is okay.
- Stop smoking and illegal drug use. Smoking can compromise your fertility and increase pregnancy complications.
- Try to reduce stress in as many aspects of your life as possible.

### Reduce Environmental Exposures

Certain chemical exposures can potentially lead to fetal birth defects. Evaluate your home and work environment for harmful substances and eliminate your exposure. Examples of harmful chemicals include: solvents, insecticides, cigarette smoke, weed killers, and lead paint.

### Know Your Cycle

- The most fertile period in a woman's cycle is 1-2 days prior to ovulation. Understanding when you ovulate is helpful in timing intercourse to increase the odds of becoming pregnant.
- Ovulation typically occurs around day 14 of your cycle. Day one of your cycle is the day your period starts.
- Use an ovulation/LH surge detection kit:
  - Use an ovulation/LH surge detection kit. This can be purchased at most pharmacies. Testing your first morning urine with the ovulation test will help detect an "LH surge," which is a hormone that increases 1-2 days prior to ovulation. When the test is positive for an LH surge, this correlates with the optimal time to have intercourse.
  - It is usually best to start testing on day 10 of your cycle. If you have regular, 28-day cycles, you should obtain a positive LH surge within 2-5 days. However if your cycle varies, or is longer than 28 days, you may not obtain a positive LH surge for 10 or more days.
  - If you are not detecting an LH surge after 3 cycles, it is important to come in for an evaluation to determine why you may not be ovulating.
- Assess cervical mucus:
  - Prior to ovulation, your cervical mucus will become clear, slippery and stretchy. Many women compare cervical mucus at this stage to raw egg whites. This correlates with the best time to have intercourse to achieve pregnancy. After ovulation, the cervical mucus becomes thick and white.
- Take Your Basal Body Temperature (BBT)
  - Using a digital thermometer, take your body temperature every morning before you get out of bed. Plot the reading on a graph or keep track of the numbers in a log book.
  - Your basal body temperature increases about ½ to 1°F once ovulation has occurred.
  - This helps determine when your body has already ovulated. You are most fertile in the 2-3 days prior to noticing the increase in BBT.

### Timing Intercourse

- It is best to have intercourse every other day around the time of ovulation. Too frequent intercourse is discouraged as it can decrease your partner's sperm count.
  - If you are using the ovulation detection kit, having intercourse every other day once you obtain a positive LH surge will increase your chances of becoming pregnant.
  - If you are not using an ovulation detection kit and you have regular, 28-day cycles, we recommend having intercourse every other day from days 10-20 of your cycle. Day 1 of your cycle is the day your period starts.