

Prenatal Care

What Is Prenatal Care?

Before getting pregnant, you may have adopted [good health](#) habits to get ready for your baby. But if you didn't, start today. One of the first steps is learning how to take care of yourself. See your [healthcare](#) provider as soon as you think you may be pregnant. Then continue prenatal care during your pregnancy.

Prenatal care helps you have a healthy baby

During prenatal care:

- Your healthcare provider evaluates the health of your pregnancy. Your provider will calculate a due date. This gives an estimate of your baby's delivery. Many women give birth between 38 and 41 weeks of pregnancy. Your due date is found by counting 40 weeks from the first day of your last menstrual period.
- The progress of your pregnancy is checked. This includes your baby's growth, fetal heart rate, changes in your weight and blood pressure, and your overall health and comfort.
- Your provider may find new concerns and manage existing ones before problems happen.
- Your provider will check lab work through blood and urine.
- Your provider will discuss normal changes that happen during pregnancy. They will also talk about changes that may not be normal. And they'll advise you about lifestyle changes.
- Your provider will answer your questions. They will also help you get ready for labor and delivery.

You are part of a team

When you're pregnant, you're part of a team. This team includes you, your baby, and your healthcare provider. Your team also may include a partner or a main support person. That could be a loved one, such as a spouse, a family member, or a friend. As you work toward giving your baby a healthy start, rely on your team members for support.

It's not too late to start good habits

What matters most is protecting your baby from this moment on. If you smoke, drink alcohol, or use drugs, now is the time to stop. If you need help, talk with your healthcare provider:

- Smoking increases the risk of losing your baby or having a low-birth-weight baby. If you smoke, quit now.
- Alcohol and drugs have been linked with miscarriage, birth defects, intellectual disability, and low birth weight. Stay away from alcohol and drugs.

- Eat a healthy [diet](#). This helps keep you and your baby strong and healthy. Follow your healthcare provider's instructions for nutrition. Also stay within the guidelines you are given for healthy [weight gain](#).
- Take 400 micrograms to 800 micrograms (400 mcg to 800 mcg or 0.4 mg to 0.8 mg) of folic acid every day. Take it for at least 1 month before getting pregnant. And keep taking it for the first trimester of your pregnancy. This is to lower your risk of some brain and spinal birth defects. You can get folic acid from some foods. But it's hard to get all the folic acid you will need from foods alone. Talk with your provider about taking a folic acid supplement.
- Regular exercise will help you stay fit and feel good during pregnancy. It can also help prevent or reduce back pain. Talk with your provider about how to exercise safely during pregnancy.
- If you have a [health](#) condition, be sure it is under control. Some conditions include asthma, diabetes, depression, high blood pressure, obesity, thyroid disease, or epilepsy. Be sure your vaccines are up to date.

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