Preparing for Pregnancy

Preparing for pregnancy (*preconceptual care*) by getting counseling and information from your caregiver before getting pregnant is a good idea. It will help you and your baby have a better chance to have a healthy, safe pregnancy and delivery of your baby. Make an appointment with your caregiver to talk about your health, medical and family history and how to prepare yourself before getting pregnant. Your caregiver will do a complete physical exam and a Pap test. They will want to know:

- About you, your spouse/partner and your family's medical and genetic history.
- If you are eating a balanced diet and drinking enough fluids.
- What vitamins and mineral supplements you are taking. This includes taking folic acid before getting pregnant to help prevent birth defects.
- What medications you are taking including prescription, over-the-counter and herbal medications.
- If there is any substance abuse like alcohol, smoking and illegal drugs.
- If there is any mental or physical domestic violence.
- If there is any risk of sexually transmitted disease between you and your partner.
- What immunizations and vaccinations you have had and what you may need before getting pregnant.
- If you should get tested for HIV infection.
- If there is any exposure to chemical or toxic substances at home or work.
- If there are medical problems you have that need to be treated and kept under control before getting pregnant such as diabetes, high blood pressure or others.
- If there were any past surgeries, pregnancies and problems with them.
- What your current weight is and to set a goal as to how much weight you should gain while pregnant. Also, they will check if you should lose or gain weight before getting pregnant.
- What is your exercise routine and what it is safe when you are pregnant.
- If there are any physical disabilities that need to be addressed.
- About spacing your pregnancies when there are other children.
- If there is a financial problem that may affect you having a child.

After talking about the above points with your caregiver, your caregiver will give you advice on how to help treat and work with you on solving any issues, if necessary, before getting pregnant. The goal is to have a healthy and safe pregnancy for you and your baby. You should keep an accurate record of your menstrual periods because it will help in determining your due date.

Immunizations that you should have before getting pregnant:

- Regular measles, German measles (rubella) and mumps.
- Tetanus and diphtheria.
- Chicken pox, if not immune.
- Herpes zoster (*Varicella*) if not immune.
- Human papilloma virus vaccine (HPV) between the age of 9 and 26 years old).
- Hepatitis A vaccine.
- Hepatitis B vaccine.
- Influenza vaccine.
- Pneumococcal vaccine (pneumonia).

You should avoid getting pregnant for one month after getting vaccinated with a live virus vaccine such as German measles (*rubella*) vaccine. Other immunizations may be necessary depending on where you live, such as malaria. Ask your caregiver if any other immunizations are needed for you.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Follow the advice of your caregiver.
- Before getting pregnant:
- Begin taking vitamins, supplements and folic acid 0.4 milligrams/day.
- Get your immunizations up to date.
- Get help from a nutrition counselor if you do not understand what a balanced diet is, need help with a special medical diet or if you need help to lose or gain weight.
- Begin exercising.
- Stop smoking, taking illegal drugs and drinking alcoholic beverages.
- Get counseling if there is and type of domestic violence.
- Get checked for sexually transmitted diseases including HIV.
- Get any medical problems under control (diabetes, high blood pressure, convulsions, asthma or others).
- Resolve any financial concerns.
- Be sure you and your spouse/partner are ready to have a baby.
- Keep an accurate record of your menstrual periods.

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