



The American College of  
Obstetricians and Gynecologists

FAQ

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS  
FAQ103  
ESPECIALLY FOR TEENS

## Having a Baby

- **When do I need to see a doctor?**
- **What happens at the first prenatal visit?**
- **How can childbirth classes help during pregnancy and childbirth?**
- **What lifestyle changes do I need to make during pregnancy?**
- **Why is it important to eat the right foods during pregnancy?**
- **Why do women take prenatal vitamins?**
- **How can exercise help during pregnancy?**
- **How much rest should I get during pregnancy?**
- **What things should I avoid that can harm my baby?**
- **Are there risks for pregnant teens?**
- **How can I prepare for parenthood?**
- **When should I see my doctor after the baby is born?**
- **What about school?**
- **Glossary**

### When do I need to see a doctor?

As soon as you think you may be pregnant, you should call your doctor to schedule an appointment. Prenatal care is the health care you get while you are pregnant. It includes medical care and counseling. The earlier you get prenatal care, the better your chances are for a healthy pregnancy and baby.

If you do not have the money for prenatal care or a way to get to an office or clinic, there are groups at schools or in your community that will help you. Talk with a counselor or school nurse.

### What happens at the first prenatal visit?

At your first prenatal visit, your doctor or nurse will ask you many questions. You will be asked about the date of your last menstrual period. This date will help your doctor figure out how many weeks pregnant you are and when your baby will be born (your due date). A pregnancy is measured in weeks. A normal pregnancy lasts about 40 weeks.

You will have a complete physical exam, which may include a **pelvic exam**. If you have never had a pelvic exam before, ask your doctor to explain it to you. You also will have a urine test, some blood tests, and tests for **sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)**.

### How can childbirth classes help during pregnancy and childbirth?

In childbirth classes, you can learn more about pregnancy, giving birth, breastfeeding, and being a parent. There may be special classes for pregnant teens. There are also classes that can help you learn how to take care of your baby. You can learn how to feed, diaper, and bathe your baby at these classes. You also will learn how to keep your baby healthy and how to deal with his or her crying. You can ask other mothers, family members, or health care staff to teach you, too.

### What lifestyle changes do I need to make during pregnancy?

For a healthy pregnancy, you may need to make some changes in your lifestyle. It is important to eat healthy foods, exercise regularly, get plenty of rest, and avoid things that could cause harm to your baby, such as alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, and other drugs (including certain over-the-counter medications).

## Why is it important to eat the right foods during pregnancy?

Eating the right foods can increase the chance that you and your baby will be healthy. You need extra nutrients while you are pregnant to support your growing body as well as your baby. Most pregnant women need an additional 300 calories per day. Those 300 calories add up fast—a glass of skim milk and a sandwich should do it.

Candy and some snack foods do not have the nutrients you and your baby need. Many contain too much fat and will add extra weight that might be hard to lose after the baby is born. You still can have the food you enjoy, but you may need to make some changes in your diet. The following things are easy ways to make your diet more healthy:

- Make sandwiches and hamburgers with lettuce, tomato, and other sliced vegetables and use low-fat or fat-free spreads.
- Use whole-grain breads and rolls, rather than white bread.
- Put vegetables on your pizza instead of pepperoni or sausage.
- Drink 100% fruit juice diluted with water or carbonated water or low-fat milk more often than sodas or coffee.
- Eat fresh fruits and vegetables without sauce or butter.
- Bake, grill, or broil meats, poultry, or fish instead of frying them.
- Eat low-fat yogurt, ice cream, or cottage cheese instead of the full-fat versions.
- Eat baked potatoes without butter or with low-fat sour cream instead of eating french fries or onion rings.
- Snack on fresh or dried fruits or vegetables instead of cookies, chips, or candy bars.

## Why do women take prenatal vitamins?

Because pregnancy requires extra nutrients, your doctor may suggest that you take a prenatal vitamin. In addition to other vitamins and minerals, a prenatal vitamin contains iron because it is not easy to get enough iron from food. Because your bones are still growing, you also may need extra calcium and phosphorus.

It also is important to make sure you are getting enough folic acid each day (at least 0.4 mg). If taken during the first 3 months of pregnancy, folic acid helps prevent certain birth defects of the spine and skull (**neural tube defects**). In some cases, even if you are taking a prenatal vitamin, you may need to take a folic acid supplement.

## How can exercise help during pregnancy?

Exercise can help make you stronger for labor and delivery and help ease some of the discomforts of pregnancy. It also may give you more energy, help you sleep well, and make you feel better. Most girls should exercise 30 minutes or more on most, if not all, days of the week. The 30 minutes do not have to be all at one time—it can be a total of different exercise periods. If you did not exercise before you were pregnant, start with a few minutes each day and build up to 30 minutes or more. Walking, dancing, and swimming are good forms of exercise. Before you start any exercise program, talk with your doctor to make sure you do not have any health conditions that may limit your activity.

## How much rest should I get during pregnancy?

During early and late pregnancy, it is common to feel very tired. It is important to get plenty of rest while you are pregnant—your body needs 8–9 hours of sleep each night. During the day, take breaks and rest when you feel tired. Exercise and a healthy diet may help boost your energy.

## What things should I avoid that can harm my baby?

Alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, and other drugs can harm you and your baby. If you use any of these substances, now is a good time to quit. If you want to stop, but cannot, ask your doctor. He or she can help you find ways to quit.

Some women need to take medicine during pregnancy for their health or for the health of the baby. If you are using, or thinking about using, any medications (over-the-counter or prescription), herbal remedies, vitamins, or minerals, talk to your doctor to find out if it is safe to use during pregnancy.

## Are there risks for pregnant teens?

Pregnant teens are at more risk for certain health problems (such as high blood pressure or **anemia**) than pregnant women who are older. Pregnant teens also are more likely to go into labor too early. These risks are even greater for teens who are younger than 15 years or those who do not get prenatal care.

Teens also are more likely to have STDs. You may have an STD and not be aware of it. If you have sex during pregnancy, you could get an STD. Using a latex condom can help prevent getting or spreading some STDs.

## How can I prepare for parenthood?

You should plan for the costs of raising a baby. You and your baby will need a place to live and money for food, clothing, diapers, and medical care. You also may have other needs, such as a car seat, a stroller, or child care.

The baby's father can help support you during pregnancy, labor, and the birth of your baby. He can learn how to take care of the baby and share in child care, too. Not all fathers want to be involved with their babies, though. Also, not all teenaged mothers want the fathers to be involved.

Many teenaged couples are not ready to commit to a marriage. Even if you do not get married, the father is required by law to pay for child support.

### When should I see my doctor after the baby is born?

Arrange to see your doctor 4–6 weeks after the baby is born (postpartum) to make sure you are healthy and to talk about your future health needs. During your postpartum visit your doctor will do a complete exam to be sure that you are healing. This is a good time to ask questions about your future health, breastfeeding, **birth control**, weight loss, sex, or your emotions. To help you remember everything to talk about, jot down any questions you have and bring them with you to this visit.

### What about school?

Even if you are not feeling well or are confused or afraid, try to continue going to school. Finishing your education will help you get a better job, earn more money, and make a better life for you and your baby.

You may need help to stay in school. Ask a counselor about community programs that offer rides to school, child care, or tutoring at home. If you cannot finish high school you can take a test for a general equivalency diploma (GED).

### Glossary

**Anemia:** Low levels of iron in the blood.

**Birth Control:** Methods to prevent pregnancy.

**Neural Tube Defect:** A birth defect that results from improper development of the brain, spinal cord, or their coverings.

**Pelvic Exam:** An examination of a woman's sexual organs (both inside and outside) using hands and sometimes a speculum (a metal or plastic instrument used to see inside the vagina).

**Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs):** Diseases that are spread by sexual contact.

### If you have further questions, contact your obstetrician–gynecologist.

**FAQ103:** Designed as an aid to patients, this document sets forth current information and opinions related to women's health. The information does not dictate an exclusive course of treatment or procedure to be followed and should not be construed as excluding other acceptable methods of practice. Variations, taking into account the needs of the individual patient, resources, and limitations unique to institution or type of practice, may be appropriate.

Copyright May 2011 by the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, posted on the Internet, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without prior written permission from the publisher.