

Thinking About a New Baby in the New Year?

Tips on Preparing for Pregnancy from Rebecca Teng, MD, OB/GYN

The New Year is often a time when people think about goals they may have for the coming year. If your plans for the New Year involve expanding your family and welcoming a new baby, you should take appropriate steps to increase your chances of having a safe pregnancy and a healthy newborn. Here are some general tips on preparing for a healthy pregnancy:

Reach a healthy weight before conceiving. Gestational diabetes and preeclampsia (dangerously high blood pressure with high urine protein) develop more often in obese women, and women with these conditions may have complicated deliveries. If you're overweight, have a discussion with your doctor about starting a healthy diet and exercise regime to help you reach a healthy weight. The healthier you are prior to conception and pregnancy, the easier your body can meet the demands of pregnancy.

Maintain a nutrient-rich diet and start taking prenatal vitamins. The most critical time for a healthy diet is during the first eight weeks of gestation. That's also the period when many women aren't aware of their pregnancies. Research shows that the folic acid supplied by prenatal vitamins may decrease the risk of fetal brain and spinal cord abnormalities, while the supplemental iron can prevent anemia. Ideally, begin taking prenatal vitamins at least two months before conception. Along with your prenatal vitamin, eat a variety of nutritious foods. If possible, include several servings of fruits and vegetables to provide important nutrients. Eat lean meats, dairy products, and fortified cereals to boost your iron, protein, and calcium reserves. If you have dietary concerns or allergies, let your doctor know.

Review your current medications with your doctor. Many over-the-counter drugs, dietary supplements, and special medications can be harmful to take during pregnancy. For example, large doses of iodine, vitamin A, some decongestants, and some common blood pressure medications have been linked to birth defects. You may need to switch medications, so speak with your doctor. Ibuprofen is not recommended if you are attempting to conceive or if you are pregnant. If you are planning to get pregnant, you should stop your oral contraceptives.

If you smoke, quit. A smoker's bloodstream contains nicotine, carbon monoxide, and cyanide - toxins that cross the placenta and deprive the fetus of oxygen. Smoking increases the risk of fetal growth retardation, miscarriages, prematurity, and stillbirth. In addition to quitting smoking, mothers should abstain from alcohol and recreational drugs.

Schedule a gynecologic exam. During your pre-pregnancy exam, your doctor will look for health problems that could complicate your pregnancy. These include diabetes, kidney disease, high blood pressure, infections, anemia, and tumors. If detected, those conditions can be treated or controlled before you conceive. Your doctor can also answer other questions you may have about pregnancy or your health.

Once pregnant, establish regular prenatal care. You may find yourself pregnant before you are able to reach those goals. Your doctor will work with you to make this process as safe as possible for both you and your pregnancy based on your health and history. Regular prenatal care can help detect and decrease risks in pregnancy.

As an obstetrician and gynecologist, family planning is one of my passions. Welcoming a new baby is a very special time for the entire family, and careful planning can help keep mothers and babies as healthy as possible.

Dr. Rebecca Teng is an OB/GYN at Steward Medical Group Paramount OB/GYN in Raynham. She is now accepting new patients. To make an appointment, or for more information, call 508-821-5671.

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