

Preconception: Healthy habits, healthy pregnancy

Are you thinking about starting a family? Here are some tips on what you need to know **before** you get pregnant.

Alcohol use: Drinking alcohol during pregnancy is never safe. It can cause harm, even before you know you are pregnant. If you stop drinking before becoming pregnant, fetal alcohol syndrome and other alcohol-related birth defects can be prevented. Need help? Call our Behavioral Health department at 616 464-8500 or 800 673-8043

Folic acid: You should take a vitamin with 0.4 mg of folic acid every day. Folic acid reduces the risk of neural tube birth defects by two thirds. Be sure to check your vitamin label. Not all vitamins include folic acid.

Lead Poisoning: Lead can be found in the paint of old houses. It can also be found in imported toys or jewelry. Lead is also found in working with auto repair, glass recycling, stained glass, pottery making, painting, and more. If you are exposed to lead, it can be transferred to your fetus. This can cause lead poisoning. Lead poisoning can lead to learning disabilities and other problems. Be sure to wash your hands often.

Some cultures use home remedies that contain lead. Avoid products such as alkohl, kajal, black powder and other herbal medicines during pregnancy.

Oral health: A mother's oral health can put her child at risk for dental problems. Good dental care can also reduce the risk for premature infants and low birth weights. Make sure you brush and floss your teeth. You should use fluoride and eat healthy. Ask your dentist what's best for you.

Overweight/Underweight: Being overweight or underweight can reduce your chance of getting pregnant. It can also increase problems with pregnancy and a risk with anesthesia.

- BMI above 30. Ask your doctor about a weight loss program. Be sure to talk about nutrition education and exercise. Obese women take longer to conceive. They are at higher risk for complications or a miscarriage. Priority Health offers many weight loss programs and exercise vendors at a discount rate. Visit priorityhealth.com.
- BMI less than 20. You may need to go on a sensible eating program to make sure you are getting adequate nutrition. Increasing your body weight can help with ovulation and fertility.

Physical, emotional or verbal abuse: You're at higher risk for going into labor too early if you have poor emotional health. If you need help, call our Behavioral Health department.

Tobacco Use: Premature birth and low birth weight may be prevented if you stop smoking before or during early pregnancy. Studies show that only 20% of women succeed in quitting smoking during pregnancy. It is a great idea to stop before you're pregnant.

Toxoplasmosis: This disease can occur if you become infected by a certain parasite. This happens if you accidentally touch your hands to your mouth after gardening or clean a cat's litter box. Cat owners: Be sure to have someone else in your home change the cat litter. You can also get toxoplasmosis by touching undercooked meat or eating contaminated raw or partly cooked meat, especially pork, lamb, or venison.