

Preconception: Medical conditions and prescription drugs

Are you thinking about starting a family? Do you wonder if your medical condition or the medicine you take may be harmful when you're pregnant? Here are some things you should know **before** you get pregnant:

Acne treatments: Talk to your doctor if you are taking isotretinoins (e.g., Accutane[®]). This medicine can cause miscarriages and birth defects. Your doctor can help you choose the birth control method that's best for you. You want to avoid getting pregnant while taking this medicine.

Antiepileptic drugs: Talk to your doctor if you're taking an antiepileptic drug (e.g., valproic acid). You may need to lower your dose if you're thinking about pregnancy.

Diabetes: Did you know that the risk of birth defects is tripled if you have diabetes? Be sure to talk to your doctor about keeping your diabetes under control.

- Some women develop diabetes in the last half of their pregnancy. This is called gestational diabetes and it often has no symptoms.
- If you have uncontrolled diabetes, your baby may weigh 10 pounds or more. This is because your high blood sugar crosses the placenta to the baby. Of course, large babies are more difficult to deliver.
- For more information about our **HealthyEncountersSM** - Diabetes Program, call Customer Service at 800 446-5674.

Family history of birth defects: It is important to know your family history. You and the baby's father should check the medical history of your parents, your grandparents and your great-grandparents. For more information, visit www.marchofdimes.com.

Hepatitis B: You're at risk for hepatitis B if you're sexually active with more than one person or if you are using drugs. Before becoming pregnant, your doctor may want you to have a hepatitis B vaccination. That's important, because hepatitis B can be spread to your baby at birth. It can cause liver failure, liver cancer and even death.

High blood pressure: It's important to keep your blood pressure under control.

- High blood pressure can cause low birth weight and early delivery. In serious cases, you can develop pre-eclampsia. This can be life threatening. Your risk of pre-eclampsia is higher if you already have:
 - high blood pressure
 - if you are under age 20 or over age 40
 - if you have diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis or lupus
- Be sure to take your medicine for high blood pressure as prescribed. Don't stop taking it unless your doctor tells you to.
- Losing weight and regular exercise can help lower your blood pressure.

HIV/AIDS: If you (or your partner) are infected with HIV, talk to your doctor. You should discuss antiretroviral treatment. Ask about information to help prevent transmitting HIV to your baby.

Hypothyroidism: If you have hypothyroidism, talk to your doctor. Your dose of Levothyroxine[®] may need to be changed for proper neurological development of the fetus.

Maternal phenylketonurea (PKU): If you were diagnosed with PKU as an infant, your babies have a high risk of mental retardation. However, you can lower the risk if you eat a low phenylalanine diet. This means, avoid all high-protein foods. High-protein foods are milk, ice cream, eggs, nuts, beans, chicken, steak and fish. Make sure you stay on the diet throughout pregnancy. Talk to your doctor and visit www.marchofdimes.com for more information.

Oral anticoagulant: If you take a blood thinner, talk to your doctor. Warfarin (e.g., Coumadin[®]) is used to control blood clotting. It is also a teratogen. Teratogens can cause birth defects. You may need to switch to a nonteratogenic anticoagulant before you become pregnant.

Rubella: Are your immunizations up to date? The rubella vaccination prevents congenital rubella syndrome, which can cause birth defects.

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs): Be sure to ask your doctor to test you for STIs, including a urine Chlamydia test. *Chlamydia trachomatis* and *Neisseria gonorrhoeae* can cause an ectopic pregnancy or infertility. STIs may cause physical and developmental disabilities in your baby or even death.