

Healthy Choices During Pregnancy

Tips for staying healthy

This handout describes some do's and don'ts during pregnancy. If you have concerns or questions, call your healthcare provider.

Staying Safe

There are many things you can do to keep you and your unborn baby safe during your pregnancy.

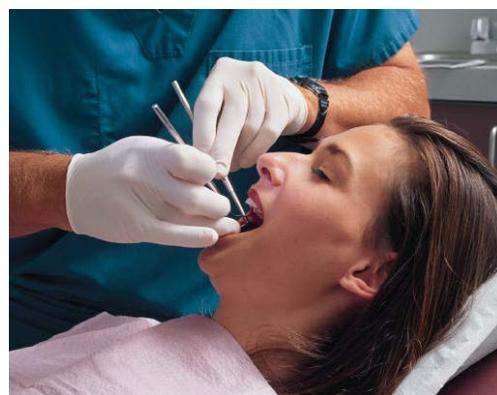
Do These:

When Riding in a Car

- Always wear your seat belt – both the lap belt, low on your abdomen, and the shoulder harness.
- On long car trips, try to stop every hour and take a short walk to help your circulation.

Take Care of Your Teeth

- Make sure your dentist and dental hygienist (and other healthcare providers) know you are pregnant.
- Visit your dentist early in your pregnancy. Tender or swollen gums are common in pregnancy. They are caused by increased blood volume and circulation. Mothers with ongoing gum disease may be at risk for preterm or low-birth-weight infants.
- Read the chapter “Taking Care of Your Teeth and Gums” in this book.



Taking good care of your teeth is important for your health and for your baby's health.

Exercise

- Swimming and walking are always good choices in a normal, healthy pregnancy.



Talk with your healthcare provider about exercise during pregnancy.

- Do not exercise to the point of being out of breath. You should be able to have a conversation while exercising.
- For most pregnant women, it is safe to keep doing your regular exercise. If you often go running or do other more vigorous exercise, talk with your healthcare provider about your exercise program. Your provider may recommend low-impact exercise later in your pregnancy.
- Be sure to drink plenty of water before and after you exercise.
- Wear proper clothing, and do not get too hot.
- You may want to do Kegel exercises to strengthen your pelvic floor muscles. You can learn to do these when you are urinating.
 - After starting to urinate, stop the flow by tightening your pelvic floor muscles.
 - Hold for 10 seconds, then release.
 - Do this exercise several times a day.

Sexual Activity

- Your interest in sex may change during pregnancy. You may be more or less interested than usual. Some women have less desire for sex during their 3rd trimester.
- Intercourse during pregnancy is safe for most women. If your pregnancy is high-risk, talk with your healthcare provider about precautions to take.
- It is OK to have an orgasm during pregnancy, as long as your pregnancy is not high-risk. An orgasm may feel like a contraction.

Avoid These:

Alcohol

- Alcohol passes through the placenta to the baby.
- A mother who drinks alcohol is at risk for having a baby with fetal alcohol syndrome or fetal alcohol effects, which may include mental retardation.
- Pregnancy is the time to stop drinking alcohol. Ask your healthcare provider for help.



Smoking harms your baby, both before and after birth.

Cigarettes

- Smoking cigarettes constricts your blood vessels, including those in the placenta. This decreases the oxygen, fluid, and nutrients that can reach your unborn baby.
- Babies whose mothers smoked during pregnancy are smaller and more likely to be born preterm. They are also more likely to have birth defects and learning disabilities compared to babies whose mothers stopped smoking before or during pregnancy.
- Babies and children who are exposed to cigarette smoke are more likely to have asthma and respiratory infections.
- There is a greater risk of SIDS (sudden infant death syndrome) if a mother smokes or a baby is exposed to secondhand smoke.
- Stop smoking during pregnancy and do not start again after your baby is born. Ask your healthcare provider for help quitting.

Douching

- **Do not douche while you are pregnant.** It can change the pH (acid/alkaline) balance of your vagina, and this makes you more likely to get vaginal infections.
- Rarely, douching can cause an air bubble to enter your circulatory system. This can be life-threatening.

Medicines and Drugs

- Talk with your healthcare provider about any medicines **before** you take them. Many over-the-counter and prescription medicines can harm you and your growing baby.
- Drugs pass through your placenta to your baby. They can:
 - Make your baby smaller and sicker
 - Cause preterm birth
 - Cause problems after birth

If you use any type of drugs, talk with your healthcare provider right away.

Hot Tubs

Do not sit in a sauna or hot tub, or any water above 100°F (37.8°C) during pregnancy, especially in the first 3 months. Hot tubs or saunas can increase your body temperature and cause problems with cell division in the fetus. This can increase the risk of birth defects or miscarriage.



While you are pregnant, be sure to wash or peel all root vegetables before you eat them.

Toxoplasmosis

Toxoplasmosis is a flu-like illness. It can seriously harm a fetus, even if the mother has only mild symptoms. It is rare in the U.S., but it is still wise to be careful.

Toxoplasmosis can be caused by an organism in cat feces. It can also be caused by eating raw or undercooked meats (especially pork, lamb, and venison) or root vegetables such as carrots that have not been washed or peeled. To keep your baby safe:

- If you have cats, have someone else clean the cat litter box while you are pregnant.
- Wear gloves when you garden. Wash your hands with warm water and soap after gardening.
- Cook meat thoroughly and wash or peel root vegetables.

Contact with Rodents

Rodents carry a virus called *lymphocytic choriomeningitis virus* (LCMV) that can harm your unborn baby. While you are pregnant, avoid contact with rodent droppings and rodents, including pets such as hamsters and guinea pigs. To reduce the risk of LCMV infection:

- Call a pest control company or have another member of the household remove rodents if there are any in your home. Do not vacuum or sweep rodent droppings, urine, or nesting materials. Have someone else do this.
- Ask a friend or family member who does not live with you to care for pet rodents in their home while you are pregnant. If this is not possible, keep the pet rodent in a separate part of your home. Have another family member or friend care for the pet and clean its cage. Avoid being in the same room where the rodent is kept.
- Wash your hands well if you have contact with a wild rodent or its urine, droppings, or nesting materials.

Questions?

Your questions are important. If you have questions, call your healthcare provider during office hours.