

Preconception: Improving Your Health and Enhancing Your Fertility When Planning for Pregnancy

By Janelle Durham, Birth Educator, Parent Trust for Washington Children. www.transitiontoparenthood.com

Pre-conception Period: Four Months Prior to Conception

Sperm development and egg maturation both take 100 – 120 days, so the ideal time to work on improving the health of both mom-to-be and dad-to-be is four months before you start trying to get pregnant. The healthier the egg and the sperm, and the healthier the mother and father, the healthier the pregnancy and the baby will be.

Steps to take: For Mom-to-Be and Dad-to-Be

This page outlines the most important things to think about. They're not just for moms... Many of these things are helpful for dads-to-be to increase fertility and sperm health, these are marked with an asterisk*.

Note: You don't have to do everything described here! Just do what feels manageable to you.

- **Healthy Nutrition and Exercise:**
 - Take 400 mcg of folic acid a day to reduce birth defects. Take a multi-vitamin.
 - Eat healthy whole foods, organic if possible. Choose whole grains.
 - Avoid trans-fats, use more unsaturated vegetable oils.
 - Eat more vegetable protein, less animal protein. Get plenty of iron, not from red meat.
 - Get to a healthy weight.* Ideally, a body mass index between 20 and 26.
 - Moderate, but not extreme, exercise increases fertility.*
- **Medical Care:**
 - Have a dental check-up. Treat any existing gum disease (increases risk of miscarriage)
 - Have a pre-conception physical. Screen for STI's* and update vaccinations.
 - Genetic screening may be recommended, depending on your age and ethnicity.
 - Manage medical conditions, such as diabetes, high blood pressure, epilepsy, etc.
- Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about any medicines or supplements you take.* Some medications are known to cause birth defects or other pregnancy complications.
- Stop smoking and drinking alcohol.*
 - Alcohol : As few as five drinks a week can reduce fertility.
 - Smoking / second-hand-smoke: significantly reduces fertility, increases birth defects.
 - Caffeine in large amounts (greater than 300 mg per day) increases miscarriage risk.
- Avoid exposures to toxic substances or potentially infectious materials.*
 - Minimize exposures to lead, mercury, cadmium, aluminum, solvents, BPA plastics, carbon monoxide, ionizing radiation, food-borne illness, infections
- Improve emotional well-being, relationship skills, and finances.
 - Emotional / mental health: Use counseling, support groups, or self-help books to process emotional challenges and build coping skills. Reduce stress.
 - Work on your relationship. Check out books, workshops, or couples' counseling.
 - Financial well-being helps make parenting a lot easier...
 - Decide whether you are really ready for a baby in your life!
- Improve your Fertility / Increase Chances of Conceiving
 - Expect that it may take months to conceive
 - Learn about fertility awareness to improve your timing of intercourse.
 - Learn about lubricants, nutritional supplements, acupuncture, and other tools which increase fertility.
- Plan for Prenatal Care and Birth: Preconception is a great time to research your options for maternity care provider (doctor or midwife) and birthplace (hospital, birth center, or home.)