

# Prenatal Education

## Key Messages for Ontario



## Health Before Pregnancy

### Key Messages

These key messages apply to all women, men, and those who consider themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, two-spirit, or queer (LGBTQ) of reproductive age. In these key messages, medications include prescription, over-the-counter, and herbal products. Drug use includes recreational or street drugs such as marijuana, cocaine, and others.

### Make a reproductive life plan.

You decide if and when you want to have children. About 50 percent of pregnancies are not planned. When pregnancies are planned, you have time to make sure you are healthy and prepared before you have a baby. Having a reproductive life plan can help. A reproductive life plan helps you to set goals and understand how children may fit into your goals. For example, what are your plans for school, work, and travel? How do children fit into these plans?

Reproductive life planning often includes thinking about:

- ▶ Your general medical health.
- ▶ Your mental health and support systems.
- ▶ Your family' health history
- ▶ Your reproductive health.

Work with your health care provider to develop your reproductive life plan. There are also online tools available to help.

If you are sexually active and not planning a pregnancy, see your health care provider about the birth control method best for you.

Talk to your health care provider if you want to delay having children until later in your life. It becomes more difficult for many women and men 35 years and over to achieve a pregnancy. Women 35 years and over may have a more difficult pregnancy and birth. They may also have greater risks of medical problems during pregnancy. The baby may also be born with health problems. The quality of a man's sperm also declines in his mid-thirties. His health problems may also increase. Even though there are fertility treatments available to assist with getting pregnant, such as in vitro fertilization, the success of treatment also declines with age.

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## Live a healthy lifestyle and protect your fertility.

Fertility means your ability to make a baby. The following tips can help you live a healthy lifestyle, which can also help to protect your fertility.

- ▶ Eat a well-balanced diet by following Canada's Food Guide.
- ▶ If you are a woman, take a daily multivitamin with 0.4 mg folic acid. Since so many pregnancies are unplanned, it is helpful if women take folic acid daily, just in case. Talk to your health care provider to find out if you need more than 0.4 mg folic acid daily.
- ▶ Maintain a healthy weight.

Being underweight or overweight can affect:

- ▶ Your health.
- ▶ Your fertility.
- ▶ Having a healthy pregnancy.
- ▶ Your future children's health.

Speak to your health care provider to learn more about healthy weight.

- ▶ Exercise regularly and reduce the time you spend sitting down.

Exercise can help you:

- ▶ Maintain a healthy weight.
- ▶ Reduce stress.
- ▶ Have a more comfortable pregnancy.
- ▶ Quit smoking and keep your home and car smoke-free.
  - ▶ Smoking can affect your fertility and the health of your baby.
- ▶ Canada's Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines recommend women drink no more than two alcoholic drinks a day, and men drink no more than three alcoholic drinks a day. However, there is no known safe level of alcohol use during pregnancy. Alcohol can affect the health of your growing baby. The safest choice for a woman who is pregnant or planning a pregnancy is not to drink alcohol at all.
- ▶ Avoid the use of recreational/street drugs. They can have serious effects on your fertility and the health of a growing baby during pregnancy.
- ▶ Talk to your health care provider if you smoke, drink alcohol, or use recreational/street drugs. Services are available to help you quit.
- ▶ If you are taking prescription medication, over-the-counter medication, or herbal products, speak to your health care provider to ensure they are safe to use if you become pregnant.
- ▶ Take care of your mental health.

If you or your family have experienced or are experiencing mental health issues, talk to your health care provider about:

- ▶ Where to find support.
- ▶ Medications that are safe to use during pregnancy.

- ▶ Take time to relax. High levels of stress can affect your fertility. There are many ways to help you reduce stress in your life. For example, you can try the following options:
  - ▶ Getting at least seven to eight hours of sleep every night.
  - ▶ Connecting with family and friends for support.
- ▶ A healthy relationship is respectful, trusting, and supportive. This is important for your overall health. If you do not feel safe and secure in your relationship, you may be in an abusive relationship. See the Abuse key messages for more information and resources.
- ▶ If you have a medical condition, talk to your health care provider before you become pregnant. Make sure your condition is under good medical control before you become pregnant to improve birth outcomes.
- ▶ Know your family and genetic history. Some health conditions can be passed on to your baby.
- ▶ See your health care provider to make sure your immunizations are up to date. This can prevent diseases that can impact fertility or health of a growing baby during pregnancy. Some immunizations cannot be given while a woman is pregnant.
- ▶ You or your partner may have a sexually-transmitted infection (STI) and not even know it. STIs such as Chlamydia and gonorrhea may not have symptoms. STIs can cause permanent damage to your ability to have children by causing infection in the fallopian tubes, and health problems for you and your unborn baby. Get tested for STIs and seek treatment if needed.
- ▶ Keep your home safe from harmful chemicals and toxic substances and be aware of workplace exposures.

There are substances at home and at work that can:

- ▶ Affect your health.
- ▶ Affect your fertility.
- ▶ Have long-term effects on the health of a baby.

See the Safety during Pregnancy key messages for more information and resources.

- ▶ See your dentist regularly. Problems with your teeth and gums may affect your health and your pregnancy.

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## **See your health care provider if you are planning to have a baby in the next few years.**

A checkup before pregnancy can help make sure you are as healthy as possible before you become pregnant. Discuss upcoming travel plans, especially if they involve regions where the Zika virus is present.

People without partners and same-sex partners who want to start a family may wish to consult a fertility specialist regarding options for achieving a pregnancy.

The following websites may be helpful:

- ▶ Government of Canada
  - ▶ Fertility Treatment Options  
<http://healthycanadians.gc.ca/healthy-living-vie-saine/pregnancy-grossesse/fertility-fertilite/traitement-traitement-eng.php>
- ▶ The LGBTQ Parenting Network  
<http://lgbtqpn.ca/>

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## Space your pregnancies and learn from your past pregnancies.

After the birth of your baby, it is best to wait at least 18 months before trying to get pregnant again. This gap gives a woman's body time to recover and gives a better chance for the next baby to be healthy.

If possible, try not to wait more than five years to become pregnant again. If you have had miscarriage, speak to your health care provider for more information on when to plan your next pregnancy.

When preparing for a future pregnancy, consider your previous pregnancy and the health of your baby.

Things to consider and discuss with your health care provider:

- ▶ Did you experience any of the following in a past pregnancy or birth?
  - ▶ Gestational diabetes, hypertension, placental abnormalities, or other complication of pregnancy.
  - ▶ High or low weight gain.
  - ▶ Mental health concerns before, during, or after pregnancy.
  - ▶ Abuse.
  - ▶ Smoking, alcohol, marijuana, or other recreational/street drug use.
  - ▶ Caesarean birth.
  - ▶ Preterm birth (birth before 37 weeks' gestation).
  - ▶ Multiple births.
  - ▶ Low birth weight (less than 2500 grams or 5 pounds and 8 ounces).
  - ▶ High birth weight (more than 4500 grams or 9 pounds and 15 ounces).
  - ▶ Birth defect.
  - ▶ Baby with medical issues.
  - ▶ Infant/fetal loss.
- ▶ Have you started new medication since your last pregnancy?
- ▶ Are your immunizations up to date?

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## Learn more about health before pregnancy.

You can find out more about health before pregnancy from the following resources.

Other Key Messages topics:

- ▶ Routine Prenatal Care
- ▶ Healthy Eating and Weight Gain
- ▶ Active Living
- ▶ Alcohol
- ▶ Smoking
- ▶ Medications and Drugs
- ▶ Safety during Pregnancy
- ▶ Abuse
- ▶ Mental Health
- ▶ Your health care provider
- ▶ Your local public health unit 1-866-532-3161
- ▶ Best Start Resource Centre
  - ▶ Health Before Pregnancy Website  
<http://www.healthbeforepregnancy.ca>
- ▶ Dietitians of Canada
  - ▶ BMI for Adults  
<http://www.dietitians.ca/Your-Health/Assess-Yourself/Assess-Your-BMI/BMI-Adult.aspx>
- ▶ Public Health Agency of Canada
  - ▶ Healthy Pregnancy  
<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hp-gs/think-pense-eng.php>
- ▶ oMama  
[www.omama.com](http://www.omama.com)