

Preparing for Pregnancy

by Dr. Sara Ohgushi, Naturopathic Physician

Q: I'm planning on getting pregnant soon. Is there anything I should do to prepare?

A: Sometimes a pregnancy is a surprise gift and then we do the best we can to take care of ourselves. But if you are planning ahead, there are a number of things you can do now which are likely to make the pregnancy go more easily and maximize the odds of having a healthy baby.

First of all, start taking a prenatal vitamin now, preferably a high quality one from a natural foods store. It won't hurt you to take it for months before you are actually pregnant. But it will help you build up a reserve of important nutrients. Folic acid, 800 mcg/day, in particular helps prevent spinal cord birth defects but is most important in the first few weeks following conception, before you even know you're pregnant. Iron is also important since anemia is common during pregnancy. Consider a simple blood test to make sure you're not anemic now.

First trimesters can be challenging in terms of fatigue and varying degrees of nausea/vomiting, which can make it difficult to eat well. In preparation, try to create a reserve of sleep and good nutrients in your body. Eat plenty of whole grains, high quality protein sources and especially VEGETABLES, our best sources of folic acid and many minerals. In other words, try to begin a pregnancy with all of your batteries charged.

Ideally, clean up your diet and begin good habits before you are pregnant. Eliminate alcohol. Eliminate or minimize caffeine and junk food. Quit smoking preferably well before you are pregnant, or as soon as you can, since cigarette smoking leads to low-birth weight and premature babies which can suffer from a variety of problems. A detoxification program may be appropriate, depending on your personal history of exposure to chemicals and heavy metals, including from cigarettes.

Start an exercise program you can maintain. Pregnancy is generally not a time to start completely new activities, but many can be continued, sometimes with modification, during at least the first half of pregnancy. Walking, yoga and swimming are all excellent activities for all stages of pregnancy. Regular exercise reduces stress, improves circulation for both

you and the baby, and will facilitate your labor and postpartum recovery.

Emotionally, start to make room in your life for a big new project! By “room” I mean bits of time and energy, ideally under lowered stress levels. Spend quality time with your partner getting to know each other even better and dreaming of the child you are inviting into your family.

Learn more about your own fertility. Many women are able to accurately detect when they ovulate. The book Taking Charge of Your Fertility, by Toni Weschler, provides many details. Ovulation kits, available in grocery stores and pharmacies, are helpful for some couples. Don't be concerned about infertility until 6-12 months of unprotected sex without achieving pregnancy. However, if you have reasons to doubt your fertility, consider consulting a Naturopathic Physician for a gentle and safe individualized treatment plan earlier.

Home pregnancy tests, also available in grocery stores and pharmacies, are quite accurate by about the time your menstrual period is due. If a home pregnancy test is positive, you are definitely pregnant. If the test is negative, it is possible that you are testing a bit too early. Try again in a few days if your period still has not started, or see a health practitioner for a more sensitive blood test.

A pregnancy is the beginning of an exciting adventure! Best wishes to all who are contemplating such a voyage....

Note: This article is not meant to substitute for direct medical advice. For more details, references to this article or questions, email Dr. Ohgushi at sao@imagina.com, or call her at 503-703-7825 to schedule a free 20 minute consultation. Dr. Ohgushi is licensed in Natural Childbirth and provides full prenatal, birth and postpartum services. As a Naturopathic Physician she also maintains a general family practice including pediatric care. OFFICE: 2304 E. Burnside, Suite 101, by appointment only.

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