

## Planning for Pregnancy

### Introduction:

Pre-pregnancy planning helps couples understand how to improve their chances of having a healthy pregnancy. It is highly recommended to schedule a pre-conception checkup visit with the doctor. This visit is important for all women, especially women under 20 or over 30, or if the woman suffers from any chronic illness, or has any special concerns.

### Important things to discuss during a pre-conception checkup visit:

- **Determining the possible conception method:**  
It is easier for the doctor to estimate the date of ovulation and possible date of pregnancy, if the woman had at least one natural menstrual cycle before pregnancy.
- **Making sure that all the necessary pre-pregnancy vaccines are taken:**  
Including: Chickenpox (varicella), German measles (rubella) because of their dangerous effects of the disease on the fetus. The vaccines will only be given after conducting blood tests preferably one month before trying to conceive, to check the immunity system and make sure that some vaccinations were not taken.
- **Chronic diseases, medications or dietary supplements:**  
If the woman suffers from obesity or chronic diseases (such as: Diabetes, asthma, hypertension, thyroid disorders or epilepsy), then it is necessary to manage the disease before pregnancy. In some cases, a change in the dosage of some medications, herbs, or dietary supplements might be necessary. The doctor may even recommend stopping certain products when planning for pregnancy.

- **Sexually transmitted infections:**

If a woman is at risk of contracting a sexually transmitted infection or believes that she or her partner suffer from a sexually transmitted infection, then it is necessary to undergo pre-pregnancy tests and screenings to diagnose and treat the condition.

- **Family history:**

The doctor should be notified of any genetic disorders that run in the family before pregnancy so that the he can refer the woman to a specialist in genetic diseases to conduct pre-pregnancy screening.

- **The couple's age:**

Older women are at a greater risk of suffering from fertility problems, miscarriage, chromosomal abnormalities, and some pregnancy-related complications (such as: Gestational diabetes). The father's age may also play a role in some of these issues.

- **Previous pregnancy history:**

It is important to mention the number of previous pregnancies and method of childbirth. the doctor should be notified of any complications that the woman may have experienced during and after pregnancy, or during delivery, or in case of previous congenital birth defects.

**The most important pre-pregnancy preparations to be followed:**

- **Folic Acid:**

Take 400 micrograms (400 mcg) of folic acid in the form of dietary supplements every day before and during pregnancy until the 12<sup>th</sup> week of pregnancy; to reduce the risk of your baby developing neural tube defects. Some women suffering from epilepsy, or diabetes, or those who have previously had child with neural tube defects are advised to take folic acid with a dose of 5 milligrams (5 mg).

- **Maintain a healthy weight:**

Being obese during pregnancy increases the risk of various pregnancy complications, including: High blood pressure, blood clots and gestational diabetes). A healthy weight can be maintained with a balanced diet and physical activity.

- **Stop Smoking:**

Smoking is linked to a number of health risks (such as: Preterm birth, low birth weight and sudden infant death syndrome).

- **Stop drinking alcohol:**

Alcohol can cross the placental barrier and reach the fetus. Excessive prenatal alcohol exposure can cause fetal growth problems.

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