



Pre-pregnancy Care

If you are pregnant or preparing to get pregnant, it is essential to optimise your health and the health of your partner so that you and your baby will be healthy throughout pregnancy. Staying healthy before and during pregnancy can improve the chances of falling pregnant, decrease complications in pregnancy and maximizing the chances of having a healthy baby.

The best place to start is to see your general practitioner (GP) or fertility specialist when you are planning for pregnancy. Things to discuss include:

- Medical history (conditions such as diabetes, blood pressure, heart diseases, etc. and medications)
- Family history of genetic conditions
- Reproductive history
- Vaccination status
- Diet, lifestyle and other habits

I would recommend:

Folic acid

This is a universal supplement of vitamin B group. Taking folic acid reduces the chances of neural tube defects such as spina bifida. You should start taking at least 400mcg /day of folic acid at least three month before pregnancy. In certain high risk women, it is recommended to take 5mg / day. Folic acid comes in a tablet by itself, or in combination with pregnancy multivitamins, or with other supplements such as iodine or iron. You can get folic acid from the pharmacy over the counter without a script.

Vitamin D

Many women are deficient in Vitamin D without knowing about it. Vitamin D is important for bone health. It is also thought to play a role in the quality of eggs in the ovary as well as many other important functions in the body. If you are at risk of low Vitamin D, such as low sun exposure or darker skin types, you should have it tested with your doctor to see if you need supplementation. Vitamin D can be purchased from the pharmacy over the counter without a script.

Pre-pregnancy Multivitamin

Consider a pregnancy multivitamin especially if you don't have a balanced diet. These can purchased from the pharmacy over the counter without a script.

Pre-pregnancy Blood Tests

These include sexually transmitted diseases, Rubella (German Measles), Varicella (Chicken Pox), Blood group and Antibodies, and Full Blood Count to screen for anaemia.

Vaccinations to consider before pregnancy:

- Rubella (German Measles)
- Varicella (Chicken Pox)
- Flu vaccine
- Pertussis (Whooping Cough)

Additional genetic testing may be performed as required. This may include prepair™ which is offered by the Victorian Clinical Genetics Services (VCGS). This is a genetic carrier screen offered to individuals and couples who are considering or are in early pregnancy.

Cervical Screening Tests "CST" (previously PAP Smears) and Breast Checks up to date

CSTs are recommended five yearly and breast checks done yearly. Please discuss this with your General Practitioner (GP).



Maintain a Healthy Weight

Being overweight or obese increases the risk of difficulty falling pregnant, miscarriage and medical complications in pregnancy such as elevated blood pressure, diabetes and heart disease.

Being underweight decreases the chances of becoming pregnant, and having a low birth baby and problems during labour.

Regular Exercise

This helps you to maintain an ideal weight as well as other health benefits physically and emotionally.

Emotional Well Being

Try to maintain your mental and emotional health by avoiding stress and practicing relaxation techniques.

Other Factors

Avoid smoking, use of habit-forming drugs, and excessive caffeine or alcohol. Certain medications, exposure to gases, chemicals, heavy metals, and radiation (X-ray) should also be avoided. If you're concerned, you should discuss this with your doctor before trying for pregnancy.

Men also have an equal importance in preconception care, as they make up half of the genetic material required to develop the baby. Men also require preconception care to improve sperm health that increases the chance of conception and a healthy baby. Having a healthy diet, supported with supplements, regular exercise and maintaining healthy weight are recommended for men as a part of pre-pregnancy care.