

Planning to Become Pregnant?

A summary of advice commonly given

This leaflet gives a summary of the advice given to women who are planning to become pregnant, or have just become pregnant. Most pregnancies go well, but this advice aims to reduce the risk of harm to the unborn baby, and to reduce the risk of pregnancy complications. There is also a longer leaflet which gives reasons behind the advice.

Things you should do

- **Take folic acid tablets** from before you become pregnant until 12 weeks of pregnancy. This helps to prevent spinal cord problems developing in the baby.
 - The dose is usually 400 micrograms (0.4 mg) a day. Can be bought from pharmacies.
 - The dose is higher and needs a prescription (5 mg daily) if you have an increased risk of having a child with a spinal cord problem. That is if: you had a previously affected pregnancy; OR your partner or a close relative have a spinal cord defect; OR you have coeliac disease (your folate intake may be affected by this condition); OR you take drugs for epilepsy; OR you have sickle cell anaemia, thalassaemia or diabetes.
- **Check you are immune against rubella.** See your practice nurse if you are unsure.
- **Eat a healthy diet.** Include foods rich in iron, calcium and folic acid.
- **Wash your hands after handling raw meat, or handling cats and kittens.** To avoid certain germs which can be harmful to a developing baby.
- **Wear gloves when you are gardening.** Again, to avoid certain germs.

Things you should avoid

- **Too much vitamin A.** Don't eat liver, liver pâté, or take cod liver oil or vitamin A tablets.
- **Listeriosis.** Don't eat undercooked meats and eggs, soft cheeses such as brie or camembert, pâtés, shellfish, raw fish, or unpasteurised milk including goat's milk.
- **Fish which may contain a lot of mercury.** Don't eat shark, marlin, swordfish. Also, limit the amount of tuna to no more than the equivalent of six tuna sandwiches per week.)
- **Sheep, lambs, cat faeces, cat litters** which may carry certain infections.
- **Peanuts** - if you have a personal or family history of eczema, hay fever, or asthma.

Things you should stop or cut down

- **Caffeine** - in tea, coffee, cola, etc. Have no more than 300 mg per day. This is in about three cups of brewed coffee, or four cups of instant coffee, or six cups of tea.
- **Alcohol** - have no more than 1-2 drinks, once or twice a week.
- **Smoking and street drugs** - you are strongly advised to stop completely.

Other things to consider

- **Immunisation** against hepatitis B if you are at increased risk of getting this infection and against chickenpox if you are a healthcare worker and have not had chickenpox.
- **Your medication** - including herbal and 'over the counter' medicines. Is it safe to take when you are pregnant?
- **Your work environment.** Do you work with chemicals, etc, which may be harmful?
- **Medical conditions.** For example, if you have diabetes, epilepsy, or other medical conditions you may need special advice before becoming pregnant. Also, if certain conditions run in your family, you may benefit from genetic counselling.