Tips for a healthy pregnancy



The day you've been waiting for has finally arrived: the extra line or dot on the stick quietly announces to the world that you're pregnant. While the ups and downs of pregnancy can, at times, be a real challenge, a few practical tips can ensure your nine month journey towards motherhood is as healthy and happy as possible.

Feast on folic acid. Studies show that folic acid can significantly reduce neural tube defects or irregular development of the brain, skull and spine that may form during the first weeks of pregnancy. Because of this, doctors recommend that women start taking a folic acid-infused multi-vitamin daily three to six months before planning to get pregnant and throughout the pregnancy. Contact your physician to determine the appropriate daily dose for your body.

Eat for one and a bit. The myth of "eating for two" is just that—a myth. Yes, you do need to eat more calories—100 more in trimester one, and about 300 in the second and third trimesters—but this hardly equals doubling your intake. Ideally those extra calories should pack an added nutrient punch for the baby's healthy development. So put down the potato chips, pop and candy (a.k.a. "empty calories") and pick up a handful of almonds, glass of milk (or soymilk) and a piece of fruit instead.

Foods rich in calcium (e.g., almonds, salmon, dairy), Vitamin D (e.g., fatty fish and fortified milk, soy milk and rice milk), Iron (found in legumes, broccoli, meat and eggs) and essential fatty acids (e.g., those in fatty fish, eggs and soy products) are particularly important to fetal development.

Keep moving. If you're already an avid exerciser, most doctors have no problem with you continuing a workout routine—usually somewhat modified after your third or fourth month of pregnancy. The main concerns around exercise and pregnancy are: risk of falls, overheating and injury due to hormonal changes that cause ligaments and joints to loosen. Pregnant couch potatoes, on the other hand, may be encouraged to begin a modest walking routine to improve their overall health and fitness level. Be sure to consult your doctor about how to modify your routine for pregnancy.

Snack well, snack often. Snacking on simple, dry foods such as whole wheat crackers, bread, almonds or rice cakes can not only provide you with an energy boost, but can also ward off the nausea and vomiting that is common with pregnancy, particularly in the first trimester.

Kick bad habits *now*. Smoking and alcohol should both be off your "to do" list pronto, as they can lead to low birth weight, birth defects and other problems down the road. If, despite your best efforts, you're having trouble kicking either of these habits, contact a qualified professional as soon as possible: your baby's health depends on it.

Stay medically connected. As soon as you discover you're pregnant, contact a medical professional (e.g., family doctor and/or midwife) to discuss prenatal care, birthing options and any other questions you might have. Several studies show that prenatal care is vital to catching problems (in mother and baby) early, greatly reducing the chances of low birth weight and infant mortality.

Know trouble signs. Contact your doctor or midwife right away if you notice: vaginal bleeding, cramping, high blood pressure, injury or a blow to your abdomen, an ongoing, severe headache, blurred vision, severe nausea or vomiting, a fever over 101°F, pain or burning during urination, or no movement from the baby (after the 25th week of pregnancy). These symptoms could possibly point to a more serious problem that could jeopardize the health of you and your baby. When in doubt, seek medical support.

Pregnancy can be a challenging journey—the nausea, weight gain and lifestyle changes aren't always easy to handle. But by staying informed, seeking extra support when you need it, and sticking to some basic rules, you'll give your baby the healthiest start possible and soon realize your nine month voyage was well worth the sacrifice.