



**Learning about pregnancy and talking with your doctor before you start trying can improve your chances of getting pregnant and help you have a healthy pregnancy.**

## See your local doctor (GP)

Before you get pregnant, book a long appointment with your GP. There's a lot to talk about to help you prepare for pregnancy.

Your GP will:

- talk with you about your health history, any health problems you have and any medicines or supplements you take
- ask about your family health history
- ask about your partner's family health history, if you have a partner
- check your vaccination history and organise any vaccinations you need before pregnancy
- discuss and organise pre-pregnancy tests
- talk with you about lifestyle factors like smoking, alcohol, drug use, diet, work and hobbies that may affect your pregnancy
- give you advice about improving your health before pregnancy
- recommend supplements.

## The importance of folate

Folic acid is a vitamin needed to build your baby's cells. In early pregnancy, it can help reduce the risk of some birth defects, like spina bifida.

It's difficult to get enough folate from food alone, so we recommend taking a supplement.

Start taking folic acid when planning your pregnancy and continue for the first 3 months after you're pregnant.

Take 500 micrograms every day, either as a folic acid tablet or in a pregnancy multivitamin.

Some people with certain health conditions or a family history of spina bifida may need a higher dose.

If you have an MTHFR gene variant that affects how your body uses folate, you can still use regular folic acid.

Your GP, midwife or pharmacist can help you choose the right supplement.

Folate can also be found in green leafy vegetables, salad greens, fruit, wholegrain breads and cereals, beans, lentils and nuts. Some breakfast cereals have folate added.

## Pre-pregnancy health checks

### Medical conditions

Talk with your GP about your current and past medical conditions before you get pregnant. This gives you time to improve your health, arrange any tests or referrals, and plan for pregnancy.

### Family history

Tell your GP about any health conditions in your family history. They may also ask about health conditions in a partner's family, if relevant.

If needed, your GP can arrange tests or referrals before you get pregnant.

## Medicines and supplements

Talk with your GP about all the medicines and supplements you take before you get pregnant. This includes all prescription medicines, over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, herbal products, and supplements.

Include anything prescribed by a GP or natural therapist, as well as products you buy from a chemist, health food shop or supermarket.

Some medicines and supplements can affect pregnancy, so it's important to check they're safe to use.

## Mental health

If you have a diagnosed mental health condition, talk with your healthcare team about how to manage it during pregnancy, birth and after your baby is born.

If you take medicine for your condition, your healthcare team can advise you if you need to change them before or during pregnancy.

## Gynaecological history

Some conditions can affect your ability to become pregnant or your pregnancy. They include:

- fibroids
- polyendocrine metabolic ovarian syndrome (PMOS), previously called polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS)
- pelvic inflammatory disease
- endometriosis.

Knowing about these conditions early will help you and your GP plan your care to support a healthy pregnancy.

## Reproductive and pregnancy history

Tell your GP if you've had:

- cervical or uterine surgery
- previous pregnancies
- miscarriages.

This helps your GP understand your full reproductive history and any possible risks.

## Blood tests

Your GP may recommend blood tests to check your immunity to infections like rubella and your blood count.

## Reproductive carrier screening test

If you haven't had one before, your GP will discuss reproductive carrier screening. This test checks whether you carry certain genetic conditions that could be passed on to a baby. You only need this test once in your life.

## Sexually transmitted infections (STIs)

Ideally, STIs should be treated before pregnancy. If you have any concerns about STIs, talk to your GP.

## Cervical screening test (CST)

You should have a CST test every 5 years. You can choose to have this test before you're pregnant, but it's also safe during pregnancy.

## Other tests

Depending on your health and family history, your GP may suggest other tests.

## Breast health

Check your breasts regularly and see your GP if you notice any changes or lumps. An annual breast examination with your GP is also a good idea.

## Dental health

A dental check-up before pregnancy is a good idea. If possible, have any dental work completed before you get pregnant.

X-rays are not recommended when you're pregnant.

## Lifestyle considerations

### Nutrition

Eating well before pregnancy helps prepare your body for the changes ahead and gives your baby the best possible start.

A healthy, balanced diet can:

- improve your chances of falling pregnant
- build up important nutrients your body will need
- reduce the risk of problems during pregnancy
- support your health during pregnancy
- help your baby grow and develop properly from the very early stage.

You can find more information about healthy eating on the Australian Government's website Eat For Health.

[eatforhealth.gov.au/eating-well](http://eatforhealth.gov.au/eating-well)

### Alcohol

It is strongly advised that you do not drink alcohol if you are planning to become pregnant.

Alcohol can affect the health of a developing baby, especially in the first few months of pregnancy. It can also affect sperm counts.

### Smoking and vaping

Smoking can harm an unborn baby. Smoking can affect fertility and increase the risk of miscarriage. It can also affect a baby's size and long-term health.

E-cigarettes and vaping are also believed to be harmful, with new research supporting this.

If you smoke or vape, try to stop before pregnancy. Speak to your GP for support and resources. If you have a partner, it's important that they quit smoking too.

## Recreational and illicit drugs

Avoid recreational drugs and illicit drugs if you are planning to get pregnant. They can harm both you and your baby. Some drugs, like marijuana and anabolic steroids, may also affect sperm counts.

### Stress and relationships

Pregnancy, childbirth and becoming a parent can be stressful. Many people also worry about work, housing and finances during this time.

Past experiences, including family violence and sexual assault, can make the idea of pregnancy or becoming a parent feel more stressful or cause anxiety.

Pregnancy and parenting can also put pressure on relationships.

If you feel overwhelmed, anxious or need support, talking with your GP, midwife, or a mental health professional.

If you do not feel safe at home, or if there is a lot of stress or worry in your relationship, talk to your GP before you get pregnant. Support is available.

## Vaccinations

### Rubella (German measles)

Rubella is usually a mild viral illness, but infection during the first 20 weeks of pregnancy can cause serious problems for a developing baby.

It's important to make sure you're immune before you get pregnant. Your GP can check your immunity with a blood test before pregnancy, even if you've been vaccinated before.

Immunity to rubella doesn't always last a lifetime.

If you aren't immune, you can get vaccinated before pregnancy. Avoid getting pregnant for 28 days after vaccination.

## Chickenpox

Chickenpox during pregnancy can increase the risk of infection, miscarriage or birth defects.

If you're not sure if you've had chickenpox or been vaccinated, talk to your GP.

If you're not immune, you can get vaccinated before pregnancy. Avoid getting pregnant for 28 days after the vaccination.

## Flu vaccination

Pregnant people can become seriously unwell from the flu. The flu vaccine helps protect both you and your baby.

Vaccination during pregnancy can also help protect your baby from flu in the first 6 months of life.

The flu vaccine is recommended during pregnancy and can be given at any stage.

The vaccine is free during pregnancy and is available from your GP.

You cannot get the flu from the vaccine. But some people may experience mild side effects. You can treat any side effects with paracetamol.

## Do you need an interpreter?



You can ask for an interpreter if you need one.

## Family Violence Support

### 1800 Respect National Helpline

You can get help if you have experienced sexual assault, domestic or family violence and abuse.

You can call any time of day or night.

1800 737 732

[1800respect.org.au](http://1800respect.org.au)

## For more information

### Pregnancy, Birth and Baby

Planning for your pregnancy

[pregnancybirthbaby.org.au/planning-for-your-pregnancy](http://pregnancybirthbaby.org.au/planning-for-your-pregnancy)

### Centre of Perinatal Excellence (COPE)

Preparing for pregnancy

[cope.org.au/trying-to-conceive/preparing-for-pregnancy](http://cope.org.au/trying-to-conceive/preparing-for-pregnancy)