

Before Birth:

Prenatal Development for Baby, Mom, and Dad

Pregnancy is a time of amazing growth for the fetus and for the future mom and dad. Even before birth, there is a lot parents can do to help their baby get off to the best start possible by taking care of themselves physically and emotionally.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- **Eat well.** Eating a balanced, healthy selection of foods and watching portion sizes is very important. What moms eat during pregnancy is what the baby is eating. Moms should “eat a rainbow”—a selection of foods with a range of colors—since these often represent a wide variety of vitamins and nutrients.
- **Stretch and do light-moderate exercise.** It’s important for Mom to keep her body moving. This improves circulation, strength, and flexibility, and can also reduce aches and pains associated with pregnancy. Moms should get doctor’s approval before starting any exercise regimen during pregnancy.
- **Relax and manage stress.** Learning to manage stress keeps Mom’s stress hormone levels down which makes her body a healthier place for a growing baby. Use regular yoga or relaxation exercises as a chance to be still and focus on the baby. These moments can help Mom feel close to the baby and begin the process of building that parent-child bond that will last the rest of your lives.
- **Include dads.** Attend prenatal visits together whenever possible. Take birth preparation classes and parent education classes as a couple. Fathers are an important source of support during pregnancy both by encouraging moms to engage in healthy practices and by helping with household tasks. Research shows the more dads are engaged during pregnancy, the stronger bond they have with the baby once it’s born, and the more positive, lasting impact they have on the baby’s long-term development. The following are ways dads can actively participate during pregnancy:
 - **Bond with your developing baby.** Sing, talk to, and read to your baby.
 - **Feel your baby’s movements.** Put your hand on Mom’s belly when the baby kicks. Notice your baby’s movement pattern—when he is active or resting
 - **Measure Mom’s belly every week or take regular photos of her growing belly.** Snap a photo of Dad’s face next to Mom’s belly—your first “baby and Daddy” picture.
 - **Take a mobile phone video or recording of the baby’s heartbeat while at the doctor’s office so you can listen to it later.**
 - **Think and talk about what you think the baby will be like.** Discuss your hopes and dreams for your baby together.
 - **Frame the ultrasound photo.** Make the ultrasound photo the “wallpaper” on your computer or phone.
 - **Write your baby a letter sharing all your excitement about her arrival.**
 - **In the third trimester, take a “family photo” of Mom—with her big baby bump—and Dad.** Take another photo after the baby is born and frame the “before” and “after” shots.

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- **Seek out and accept family and social support.** Having a strong support system keeps stress levels down. Research has found that strong family and social networks also help women make and maintain healthier lifestyle choices.

WHAT MOMS SHOULD AVOID:

- **Excessive weight gain or inadequate weight gain.** The World Health Organization recommends a weight gain of 28 pounds (12.8 kg) for women with normal body-mass index (BMI), 14.5 pounds (6.6 kg) for women with high BMI, and 41.5 pounds (18.8kg) for women with low BMI. Gaining an appropriate amount of weight is one way you can take care of your baby from the start.
- **Smoking and second-hand smoke.** Both are unhealthy for mother and baby.
- **Drinking alcohol.** If you drink, it means your baby is drinking too!
- **Dieting.** While some women find it hard to see their body change during pregnancy, remember that your baby needs you to gain a healthy amount of weight. If you deprive yourself of food, especially nutrient-rich foods, you are also depriving your baby of important nutrients he needs to grow and develop.
- **X-rays.** Always tell your doctor you are pregnant and avoid having x-rays taken until after the baby's birth unless absolutely necessary.
- **Hot tubs and saunas.** These can dangerously overheat your baby and should be avoided. Of course, contact or risky sports like skiing also have to be put on hold!
- **Use of certain prescription and over the counter medications and supplements.** These can negatively impact your baby's development. Check with your doctor before taking any medicines, herbs, or vitamins during pregnancy.