



Planning Your Pregnancy



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See: www.rotunda.ie and www.rotundaprivate.ie

You can improve your chances of getting pregnant and having a healthy pregnancy by following these steps.

Take a folic acid supplement

It's recommended that all women who could get pregnant should take a daily supplement of folic acid.

So you should take a 400 microgram supplement of folic acid every day before you get pregnant, and up until you're 12 weeks pregnant.

A microgram is 1,000 times smaller than a milligram (mg). The word microgram is sometimes written with the Greek symbol μ followed by the letter g (μg).

Folic acid reduces the risk of your baby having a neural tube defect, such as spina bifida.

A neural tube defect is when the fetus' spinal cord (part of the body's nervous system) does not form normally.

Some women are advised to take a higher dose supplement of 5 milligram (5mg) every day.

You may need to take a 5mg supplement of folic acid if:

- you or the baby's biological father have a neural tube defect
- you previously had a pregnancy affected by a neural tube defect
- you or the baby's biological father have a family history of neural tube defects
- you have diabetes
- you have epilepsy or take anti-epilepsy medicine

Talk to a GP if you think you need a 5mg dose of folic acid, as a higher dose needs to be prescribed.

You can get folic acid tablets at pharmacies without a prescription or talk to your GP about getting a prescription, if you need a higher dose.

Do not worry if you get pregnant unexpectedly and were not taking folic acid supplements. Start taking them as soon as you find out, until you're past the first 12 weeks of pregnancy.

Does my age affect my chances of having a baby?

More and more women are waiting until their 30's and 40's to have children. About 20 to 30 percent of women in Ireland now have their first child after age 35. About one third of couples in which the woman is over 35 have problems getting pregnant.

Ageing decreases a woman's chances of having a baby in the following ways:

- The ability of a woman's ovaries to release eggs ready for fertilization declines with age.
- The health of a woman's eggs declines with age.
- As a woman ages she is more likely to have health problems that can interfere with fertility.
- As a women ages, her risk of having a miscarriage increases.
- Men's age also has an impact.

Stop smoking

Smoking during pregnancy has been linked to a variety of health problems, including:

- premature birth
- low birth weight
- sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), also known as cot death
- miscarriage
- breathing problems or wheezing in the first 6 months of life

You can find useful information on the dangers of smoking during pregnancy and advice on how to stop on the www.quit.ie website.

Quitting can be hard, no matter how much you want to, but support is available.

The HSE provides and promotes a wide range of cessation services, ranging from online and social media supports on www.quit.ie and www.facebook.com/HSEquit, a National Smokers' QUITline 1800 201 203, HSE quit clinics and courses, primary care supports provided by GPs, Pharmacists and Dentists, and tobacco dependence treatments.

Smoke from other people's cigarettes can damage your baby, so ask your partner, friends and family not to smoke near you.

Cut out alcohol

Do not drink alcohol if you're pregnant or trying to get pregnant. Alcohol can be passed to your unborn baby.

It is advised by The Department of Health that the safest approach is not to drink alcohol at all.

Drinking in pregnancy can lead to long-term harm to your baby, and the more you drink the greater the risk.

Keep to a healthy weight

Being overweight (having a BMI over 25) or obese (having a BMI over 30) raises the risk of some pregnancy problems, such as high blood pressure, blood clots, miscarriage and gestational diabetes.

Before you get pregnant, you can use the BMI healthy weight calculator to work out your BMI. But this may not be accurate once you're pregnant, so consult your midwife or doctor.

Having a healthy diet and getting moderate exercise are advised in pregnancy, and it's important not to gain too much weight.

You can keep to a healthy weight by eating a balanced diet and getting exercise.

Know which medicines you can take

Not all medicines are safe to take when you're pregnant; whether they're on prescription or medicines you can buy in a pharmacy or shop.

If you take prescribed medicine and you're planning to get pregnant, talk to your doctor. If you get pregnant or are on medication-talk to your GP as soon as possible.

Do not stop taking your medicine without talking to your doctor.

Get flu and whooping cough vaccinations

If you have not had 2 doses of the MMR vaccine or you're not sure if you have, ask your GP practice to check your vaccination history before pregnancy.

If you have not had both doses or there's no record available, you can have the vaccinations at your GP practice.

You should avoid getting pregnant for 3 months after having the MMR vaccination, which means you'll need a reliable method of contraception.

Talk to your doctor if you have a long-term condition

If you have a long-term condition, such as epilepsy or diabetes, it could affect the decisions you make about your pregnancy – for example, where you might want to give birth.

While there's usually no reason why you should not have a smooth pregnancy and a healthy baby, some health conditions do need careful management to minimise risks to both you and your baby.

Before you get pregnant, have a discussion with your specialist or GP about getting pregnant.

If you're taking medication for a condition, do not stop taking it without consulting your GP.

How can I improve my chances of becoming a dad?

It may seem obvious, but you need to have regular sex (two or three times a week) if you want to become a dad. Having sex around the time your partner ovulates (when an egg is released from the ovary) will increase your chances of conceiving.

There are also a number of lifestyle changes you can make to improve your chances of becoming a dad.

Sperm temperature

Your testicles are outside your body because, to produce the best quality sperm, they need to be kept slightly cooler than the rest of you. The ideal temperature for sperm production is around 34.5C, which is slightly below body temperature (around 37C).

If you're trying to conceive, taking a few simple measures to keep your testicles cool may help. For example, if your job involves working in a hot environment, take regular breaks outside. If you sit still for long periods, get up and move around regularly.

Wearing tight underwear is also thought to increase testicle temperature by up to 1C. Although research has shown that tight underwear does not seem to affect sperm quality, you may want to wear loose-fitting underwear, such as boxer shorts, while trying to conceive.

Smoking

Smoking can reduce fertility, so you should give up smoking if you want to become a dad.

Smoking around a newborn baby also significantly increases their chances of respiratory disease and Cot Death (Sudden infant death syndrome)

You can find useful information on the dangers of smoking during pregnancy and advice on how to stop on the www.quit.ie website. Quitting can be hard, no matter how much you want to, but support is available.

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Stress

Stress can affect your relationship. It can also lower your or your partner's sex drive (libido), which may reduce how often you have sex. Severe stress may also limit sperm production.

Alcohol

Drinking alcohol excessively can affect the quality of sperm. The Department of Health recommendation is to drink no more than 14 units of alcohol a week, which should be spread evenly over three days or more.

One unit of alcohol is the equivalent of half a pint of beer or lager, or a single pub measure (25ml) of spirits. A small glass of wine (125ml) contains 1.5 units of alcohol.

Drugs

Some recreational drugs are known to damage sperm quality and reduce male fertility. These include:

- cannabis
- cocaine
- anabolic steroids
- amphetamines
- opiates such as heroin and methadone

You should avoid taking these types of drugs if you're trying for a baby.

Diet, weight and exercise

Eating a healthy balanced diet and maintaining a healthy weight essential for keeping your sperm in good condition. Your diet should include at least five portions of fruit a day; carbohydrates such as wholemeal bread and pasta; and lean meat, fish and pulses for protein.

Being overweight (having a body mass index above 25) may affect the quality and quantity of your sperm.

If you're overweight and trying to conceive, you should try to lose weight by combining healthy eating with regular exercise.



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