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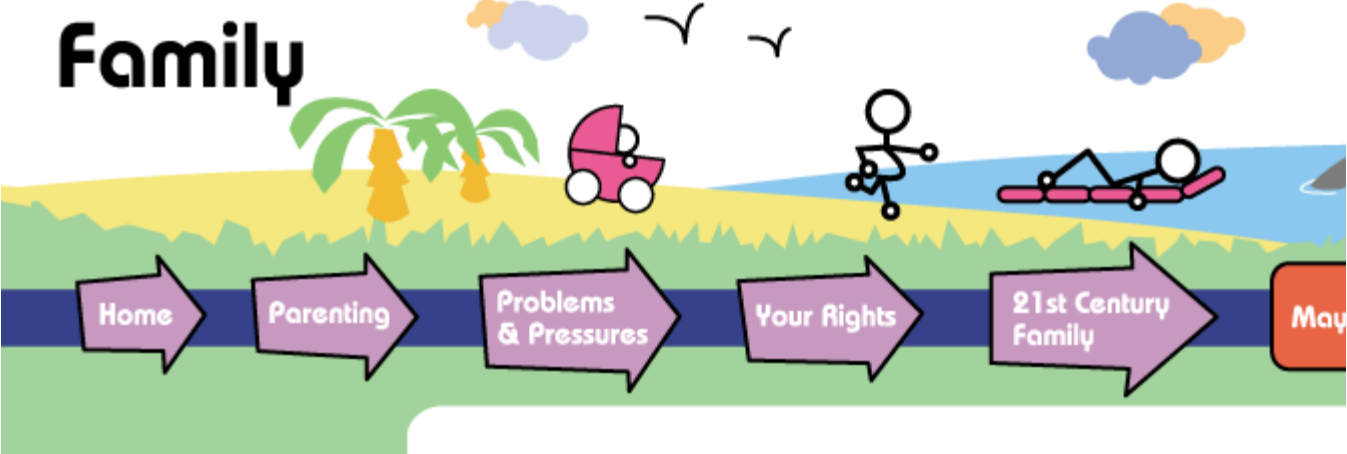
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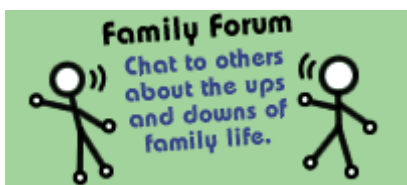
# Family



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## making baby: tips for your first pregnancy

by Debbie Marco

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You've probably spent most of your life so far trying not to get pregn and, in the process, become an expert in contraception. But what shc you do if you actually want to have a baby? Obviously a healthy sex l a good start but there is also some pre-pregnancy planning you and partner can do in order to increase your chances of conception.

### contraception and ovulation



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If you are taking the contraceptive pill doctors recommend waiting at least one month after you pill-free period before trying for a baby. Although is no evidence to show that falling pregnant stra away will be harmful to the baby, coming off the give your cycle a chance to settle down and let y know when you are ovulating. If you are having contraceptive injections, such as Depo-Provera, it may take longer for you to re-emerge.



Dr Joseph Iskaros, consultant in Obstetrics and Gynaecology at University College Hospital, stresses that timing is the most important thing when trying to conceive. Ovulation takes place around the 14th day of the menstrual cycle. Dr Iskaros recommends intercourse on days 11 through to 17 in order to maximise the chances of conception.

Ovulation kits, available from chemists, can pinpoint when you are most fertile by measuring the hormone responsible for releasing eggs from your ovaries. You can also keep a note of your body temperature, as it is likely to drop slightly before ovulation begins.

### rubella

Most women in Britain have been vaccinated against rubella, which can cause a severe handicap if the baby is exposed to the disease during early pregnancy.

Have a blood test to check your immunity. If this reveals you are not immune, get vaccinated immediately and avoid pregnancy for three months as the vaccine can affect the baby too.

### smoking, drinking and drugs

Smoking during pregnancy is estimated to account for 20-30% of low-birth weight babies, up to 14% of preterm deliveries, and some 10% of all infant deaths. Women who smoked tobacco were 80% more likely to have a miscarriage, according to a 1999 study in the *New England Journal of Medicine*. Several studies also show that women who smoke during pregnancy have an increased risk of ectopic pregnancy.

Babies of smokers are also often smaller because they are starved of oxygen while they are in the womb.

Men need to stop smoking before trying to conceive too, because cigarettes affect the quality of sperm.

Women can still have a drink or two, but shouldn't binge on alcohol. A maximum of seven units spread over the week is the recommended amount for women trying to get pregnant. Men also need to cut down on alcohol because too much can lower sperm count and increase the number of abnormal sperm.

Ask your doctor whether you can continue with any prescription drugs you are taking, and check with the pharmacist if you are taking any over-the-counter medication. All illegal drugs can have severe effects on your health so should be completely avoided. This is relevant for men too as it has been proven that marijuana makes sperm sluggish.

### diet and exercise

Your body will be under extra strain during pregnancy due to the added weight of the baby, so you should be relatively fit before conception. Try some light exercise such as walking, swimming and cycling for 20 minutes, three times a week.

Stress can have an influential effect on your cycles of ovulation. Dr Iskaros says it is important to modify your life to make it less stressful. Take time for yourself and practise relaxing with exercise such as the Alexander Technique or yoga.

A well-balanced diet for both partners is important. This should include lots of fresh fruit and vegetables, which contain antioxidants to stop colds and keep your immune system healthy. Women should cut back on caffeine because more than one cup a day can delay conception and increase the chances of miscarriage. Men can do their bit by making sure they have enough zinc and vitamin C in their diets. This may help to ensure they have a high and active sperm count.

Folic acid supplements will reduce the risks of your baby being born with neural tube defects, but consult your doctor if you are taking drugs to control epilepsy. Some of these drugs have an effect on folic acid levels, so if you are taking one of these drugs your doctor may advise an increase in the dose.

In general, a 400-microgram (0.4mg) tablet of folic acid should be taken daily for three months before getting pregnant and during the first three months of pregnancy. It can be bought without prescription. Foods that are rich in folic acid include sprouts, spinach, orange juice, dried apricots and fortified breakfast cereals.

### **tips for men**

Men should wear loose-fitting boxer shorts instead of Y-fronts and avoid tight jeans. Clothes that are tight warm up the testicles and lower the quality of sperm. Also, it is worth remembering that sperm produced today were formed three months before, so you may have to wait a while before lifestyle changes begin to take effect.

### **what if nothing works?**

If you have spent a year to a year and a half trying to get pregnant with no success, it is probably time to see your doctor. GPs can do sperm analysis to check it is healthy, and blood tests to check ovulation is okay. You can also have X-rays and scans to check the fallopian tubes are fully open. If one of you has untreatable fertility problems, options such as IVF can then be looked into.

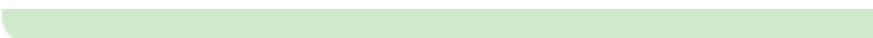
(December 2001, resources updated June 2005)

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