

One of the most important prenatal visits may take place before a woman is even pregnant. A woman can take several steps prior to conception that can help prevent some health problems for both herself and her baby. Preconception counseling offers a setting in which a woman (or couple) can meet with a health professional to discuss specific concerns and outline a plan for the preconception period, as well as for a pregnancy. Preconception counseling is available through Palmetto Health-USC Obstetrics and Gynecology, Genetic Counseling.

**Preconception care may include:****1. Identification of risk factors****Maternal Health Factors**

- Controlling certain health issues prior to pregnancy may greatly improve the chance of a successful pregnancy
- Examples of conditions to consider: diabetes, high blood pressure, seizure disorder, maternal PKU

**Medications**

- Some medications are considered safe to take during pregnancy, while a doctor may choose to change other medications prior to pregnancy
- Examples of medications to discuss: seizure medications, anti-depressant or anxiety medications.

**Immunizations**

- Many women are already immune to most major infections. However, identifying which women are not immune and providing the proper immunizations or booster shots may be beneficial.

**Lifestyle**

- Improving your health is beneficial in pregnancy. Things to consider include:
  - Eat a healthy diet and maintain a healthy weight
  - Exercise
  - Stop smoking and drinking alcohol or using recreational drugs
  - Take a vitamin with at least 0.4mg of folic acid

Folic acid, also known as folate, is a B vitamin that has been shown to reduce the chances that a baby will have spina bifida (open spine) or other specific birth defects. Since the spine forms very early in the development of the baby, it is important to begin taking the vitamin before you know that you are pregnant. Because pregnancies are not always planned, it is a good idea for all women of childbearing age to take a multivitamin that contains folic acid.

**Family Medical History**

Your personal pregnancy history may be important. For example:

- If you have experienced several miscarriages, doctors may recommend a workup prior to pregnancy and/or suggestions for interventions during pregnancy.
- If you have a child that has been diagnosed with a genetic condition, intellectual disability, or if you had a baby with a birth defect or that was stillborn, certain prenatal tests may be offered.

Your family history may also be important. Genetic conditions, intellectual disability or birth defects in relatives (such as siblings, parents, aunts, uncles or cousins) may increase the chance of that condition recurring in the family. Certain testing or screening may be offered to provide additional information about how high or low the risk may be.

Your ethnic background may put you at higher chance to be a carrier of certain genetic conditions. For example:

- African-American Ancestry - Sickle Cell Disease
- Greek, Italian, or other Mediterranean ancestry -  $\beta$ -Thalassemia
- Ashkenazi Jewish ancestry - Tay Sachs Disease, Canavan Disease, Cystic Fibrosis and others
- Northern European Caucasian - Cystic Fibrosis

Screening tests are available that can tell a person if they are a carrier of these conditions. Only if both members of a couple are carriers of the same genetic condition will the pregnancy be at increased risk.

**2. Education and referral for specific risks****3. Counseling regarding social or emotional issues****4. Laboratory tests or immunizations as indicated**

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