

# Just in Time Parenting

**If you are raising your baby alone you will have added pressures on your time and energy.**

- The decisions and arrangements you make now will help make parenting a little easier.
- Check for resources and programs for parents in your community — including community centers and churches.
- It is important to build a support network (including friends, family and other parents) to help you be the best parent you can be.

## Look around your house for hazards that might affect pregnancy.

Get rid of hazards in your home. Toxins found in pesticides, household cleaners, and pipes can affect your baby's development. Talk with a doctor, nurse, or Extension agent to find ways to reduce these hazards in your home. The Environmental Protection Agency lists tips for keeping your home safe.

[www.epa.gov/pesticides/factsheets/child-ten-tips.htm](http://www.epa.gov/pesticides/factsheets/child-ten-tips.htm)



## Congratulations!

### Becoming a parent brings joy and change.

Becoming a parent is fun and scary at the same time. Future moms and dads may feel excitement, joy, pride, fear, worry, and insecurity. All of these feelings are normal. This is a very

important time for you and your partner. You will need each other's support and encouragement as you start this new and exciting adventure called parenting.

Having a baby, especially your first, is a time of many changes. Most first time parents don't know what to expect for the big event — or how the new baby will impact their lives.

- You will need to figure out how to juggle responsibilities of work or school and family.
- Your new baby will bring new joy, but also new pressures and worries. It's normal to feel a little overwhelmed.

You're not expected to figure everything out overnight. You're not alone in how you feel. This time of adjustment will pass.

## Future moms: Be as healthy as you can be!



● **Eat healthy foods.** Each day, eat several servings of whole grains, fruits, vegetables, and calcium-rich foods — such as milk, yogurt, and cheese. Cut down on foods high in fat, sugar, and salt. The food guide pyramid for pregnant women [www.mypyramid.gov/](http://www.mypyramid.gov/) can help you plan healthy meals.

● **Take a folic acid supplement and eat foods that are rich in folate** (the natural form of folic acid) — such as green leafy vegetables, kidney beans, orange juice, peanuts, broccoli, asparagus, and peas. Foods that are enriched with folic acid include breads, pasta, rice, and cereal. Folate helps your body produce and maintain healthy cells — which is especially important when you are pregnant.



● **Keep active.** Make exercise part of your daily routine. Exercise can help you have a healthy pregnancy and reduce stress. Talk to your doctor to create the best exercise plan for you. My Pyramid tracker [www.mypyramidtracker.gov/](http://www.mypyramidtracker.gov/) can help you figure out what physical activity level is best for you.



● **Stay mentally healthy.** Having a baby is a wonderful experience, but it will be stressful at times. People who feel good about themselves seem to be able to handle parenting better. Smoking, drinking, and using drugs put your baby at risk.

## Future dads: Be a part of the pregnancy by talking to your partner.

When a couple finds out that they are going to have a baby, most of the attention seems to focus on the mother-to-be, and later it will focus on the new baby. But this is a time when fathers are needed. Pregnant women sometimes are uneasy about the way their bodies change. They may become upset that they don't look the way they used to, can't move the way they used to, and feel more tired than they used to.

Talk to your partner. Tell her how you feel about her and the new baby. Listen to how she is feeling. Sharing your feelings can bring you closer together. You can experience this pregnancy together.

Future dads need to eat healthy and exercise, too! My Pyramid tracker <http://www.mypyramidtracker.gov/> can help you figure out what physical activity level is best for you.

## Moms-to-be: See your doctor to make sure you have a healthy pregnancy.

Set up a visit with a doctor. The doctor will find out about your overall health and look into any diseases or medical problems that could affect your pregnancy and your baby's health. Talk with the doctor about your family's medical history.



Check with the doctor about taking prenatal vitamins and folic acid. A future mom can prevent birth defects, such as spinal cord problems, by making sure she has enough folic acid in her diet. Future moms should take folic acid at least

3 months before they began trying to get pregnant. Women need at least 400 micrograms of folic acid every day from foods with folic acid, from a prenatal vitamin, and/or from a folic acid pill.

Find out your family medical history. Do you or your partner have a family history of genetic diseases, pregnancy-related issues, or medical problems that run in your family? Ask your relatives if you don't know.

## Talk with your partner about how you want to raise your baby.

It's a good idea to talk with your partner about the practical side of raising your baby. Who will do what to raise your baby? How will you share caring for the baby with your partner?

- Who will care for the baby each day?
- What, if any, religion do you want your child to be raised with?
- Were you or your partner abused during childhood? How did it affect

you? How do you think your past abuse will affect your parenting?

- What changes do you think you'll have to make to give a new child a great start?
- How will your life be different once you're a parent?
- What kind of discipline will you use with your child?
- How are your finances? Have you started to save money to raise your baby? Have you figured out

## Smoking, drinking, and using drugs put your baby at risk.

All of these habits will put your baby at risk for birth defects and illnesses. Alcohol use by pregnant women can cause babies to have Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS). Babies born with FAS have physical and mental problems, such as mental retardation.

Most women are pregnant before they know they're pregnant. By then babies have already started to develop and grow. So it's best to play it safe and not drink wine, beer or other alcoholic beverages if there's any chance you might be pregnant or are trying to get pregnant.



how much it will cost to raise your baby? See the "Cost of Raising a Child Calculator from USDA"

[www.cnpp.usda.gov/calculatorintro.htm](http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/calculatorintro.htm)

# Your baby's pre-natal development in the first trimester.



## Prenatal Month 1

- Baby is about  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch long
- Small buds are growing that will become arms and legs
- Heart is beating and pumping blood
- Backbone is forming
- Future moms' average weight gain is  $\frac{1}{2}$  to 1 pound

## Prenatal Month 2

- Baby is about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inch long
- Weighs about the same as a paper clip
- Arms and legs are growing
- Face and eyes are beginning to form
- Future moms' average weight gain is  $\frac{1}{2}$  to 1 pound

## Prenatal Month 3

- Baby is about  $2\frac{1}{2}$  to 3 inches long
- Weighs about  $\frac{1}{2}$  ounce
- Arms, hands, fingers, legs, feet and toes are fully formed
- Eyes are almost fully developed but are still closed
- Future moms' average weight gain is  $1\frac{1}{2}$  to 2 pounds

## By the end of the first trimester pregnant moms' waist may thicken.

Even though you may not be showing, important changes are happening in your body at this stage of pregnancy.

- Your stomach may begin to get a little bigger and it may be harder to fasten your pants or belt.
- You might feel tired and have to go to the bathroom more often than you used to.
- You probably will not be able to feel your baby moving yet.

This is all normal and part of having a baby grow inside you.

*Every woman and every pregnancy is different. You might feel many of the physical signs of pregnancy such as morning sickness or nausea, breast tenderness, tiredness, constipation — or you might not feel any of them. Pay attention to your body and if you have any reason to believe things are not right, call your doctor right away.*

## Questions about medical issues during pregnancy can be overwhelming.

There are lots of medical issues that people worry about once they become pregnant. Be sure to ask your doctor about them. Some questions may be about things your friends or family members have told you like:

- **Toxoplasmosis.** This is a rare, but serious infection that a baby can get from the mother during pregnancy. People usually get toxoplasmosis by eating raw or undercooked meats, drinking unpasteurized milk, and handling the feces of cats. In newborns, this infection may cause vision or hearing loss, learning disabilities, seizures, or death. The effects on babies are more severe if the mother gets infected early in the pregnancy.

- **Having a baby after 35.** Most mothers 35 and older have healthy babies, but some older women have a higher risk of miscarriages, high blood pressure, diabetes, and a baby born with Down syndrome. It's important for all women — including those over 35 — to keep regular appointments with their doctor during pregnancy in order to monitor their health.

- **Preeclampsia.** After 20 weeks of pregnancy — but sometimes earlier — some pregnant women have severe high blood pressure (hypertension). This condition is known as preeclampsia and can be mild or severe. Signs of severe preeclampsia may include sudden and rapid weight gain, blurred vision, severe headaches, nausea and vomiting, and/or intense pain in the upper right abdomen. The most common treatment for preeclampsia is to deliver the baby if it is safe to do so. If the baby has not developed far enough, the

mother may be placed on bed rest. There is no proven way to prevent preeclampsia.

- **Gestational diabetes.** Even women who have no history of diabetes may develop diabetes when they're pregnant. Your doctor will check for this at your first doctor's visit. Women who have gestational diabetes are extremely thirsty and hungry, very tired, and have a high blood sugar count on a diabetes test. Doctors can help future moms with this condition and help them have a healthy baby.



## Becoming parents will change your couple relationship.

You're about to add a new person to your family... a baby who needs your love and attention. Planning for your new baby is exciting and emotional. It's easy to put your couple relationship on hold while you're making plans for this new stage in life.

**It's important for you and your partner to keep your relationship strong.** That takes time and energy — both of which will be in short supply once your baby is born.

Here are a few quick and easy ideas to stay connected as a couple:

- Offer a back rub to your partner; everybody likes that!
- Talk about when you first met and what attracted you to one another.
- Bring your partner a healthy treat — like an apple or celery sticks with peanut butter.
- Say, "Something I really like about you is..." Make sure it's a compliment.



## Most couples can still have sex during pregnancy.

For most couples, sex is an important, special part of their relationship. Having sex will not hurt your baby, unless you have been told otherwise by your doctor.

During pregnancy, there are usually changes in your interest in having sex and the pleasure you and your partner get from sex. Nausea, fatigue, vomiting, changes in body shape, and fear of hurting the baby are all things that affect how couples feel about sex.

Some partners might feel jealous because the mother-to-be is getting a lot of attention. These feelings may affect your partner's sexual interest. You should talk openly and honestly with each other about these feelings.

Remember to keep the lines of communication open about your sex life, as well as other issues. Talking it out can solve problems and bring you closer emotionally. If you have questions or concerns, discuss them with your doctor.

Your doctor will be able to give you advice and tell you if there are any medical reasons not to have sex during your pregnancy.



## Plan where and how your baby will be born.

There are some decisions you will have to make regarding your childbirth — including where to deliver your baby. Depending on where you live, you might be able to deliver at a hospital, a birthing center, or in your home. If you want to deliver at a hospital, find out if your doctor delivers babies at the hospital on your insurance plan.

How do you want your baby to be born? Will it be natural childbirth? Whether you choose this type of childbirth or not, taking a childbirth class will help answer questions about giving birth. Childbirth classes may be offered by your hospital, a community agency, or community college.

Depending on your doctor, you may be able to make some of these decisions:

- Who you want to be in the room with you during labor
- What type of position you want to be in for pushing
- What type of atmosphere you want in the room — like lighting or music
- What you want to eat or drink during labor
- What kinds of medicine you want to use

## Expect emotional changes during pregnancy.

When women first get pregnant they might feel like they are riding on an emotional roller coaster. They feel joyful and excited one minute, fearful and anxious the next. These mixed emotions are common.

Future moms might have:

- Mood swings
- Trouble thinking clearly
- Sudden moments of sadness and irritability
- Fear and worry about the pregnancy and becoming a parent

Hormonal changes and physical changes in women's bodies can cause them to feel tired and touchy. Even though partners are not pregnant and are not having the same hormonal and physical changes, they may have similar feelings. Try to be patient with each other and realize that many couples have the same feelings when they are expecting a baby.

You can deal with these emotional changes by:

- Getting enough rest, eating well, and going to your doctor appointments.
- Talking with someone about your thoughts and feelings to help with tension and stress.
- Exercising, meditating, or doing yoga for pregnant women.



# Visit the hospital before you give birth to get familiar with it and avoid misunderstandings.

- Take a tour of the hospital to find out about their procedures.
- Ask your doctor to tell you about the procedure for a regular delivery.
- Ask questions; don't be embarrassed that you may not know something about the birth.

## Want to Learn More?

For more parenting info and updated links, visit <http://www.extension.org/parenting>.

If you have questions, contact your local Extension office.

*Credits: This newsletter is adapted from Extension Just In Time Parenting newsletters in California, Delaware, Georgia, Iowa, Kentucky, Maine, Tennessee, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico and Wisconsin.*