



healthy pregnancy

by Vicki L. Dihle, PA-C



You're pregnant— now what?

- *The single most important thing* to do right away is schedule an appointment with a medical provider who takes care of pregnant women—an obstetrician, family doctor or certified nurse-midwife.
- Begin taking prenatal* vitamins and minerals. Most women don't get enough calcium, folic acid and iron in their diets, so supplements are very important for you and your baby.
- Eat a healthy diet, drink a minimum of eight glasses of water per day and get at least eight to nine hours of sleep each night.
- Stop using anything that can hurt your baby, such as tobacco, alcohol, marijuana or other drugs. If you need help in stopping these habits, let your provider know because she will have tools that make it easier.

* *Prenatal* refers to the time before birth.

Common symptoms of pregnancy:

- Some nausea and vomiting, also known as “morning sickness,” that usually subsides after about 12 weeks
- Fatigue and being more tired than normal
- Being more thirsty and hungry than normal
- Minor aches, pains and discomforts
- Headaches
- Bleeding gums when you brush or floss your teeth
- Heartburn or indigestion
- Being more emotional or teary than normal

What to expect at your prenatal appointments:

You will be asked a lot of questions about your health and habits. It is very important that you be completely honest, especially about previous pregnancies, miscarriages, abortions or any surgery on your cervix or uterus. This will help the medical staff give you and your baby the best care.

Write your questions in a notebook and take it to every appointment so you don't forget what to ask your doctor.

- Your height, weight and blood pressure will be measured. If possible, your provider will also listen to your baby's heartbeat and measure how much he or she is growing.
- At one of the first appointments you may have a pelvic exam, a PAP test and screening for sexually transmitted infections or diseases. Some blood will be taken for other tests.
- You will be asked about your eating, exercise and sleep habits.
- If you aren't already taking prenatal vitamins, you will be asked to start right away. You may also be advised to take an additional folic acid supplement every day.
- Other tests are done at different times to make sure your baby is healthy and growing normally.
- An ultrasound is usually done in the second trimester. You will be able to see your baby and may learn the baby's sex.
- Typical appointments are scheduled:

- **Once a month until you are about 28 weeks pregnant**
- **Twice a month until 36 weeks**
- **Weekly after 36 weeks until your baby is born**

Call your prenatal provider right away if:

- You experience pelvic cramping, spotting, bleeding or vaginal discharge.
- You experience fever, chills or stomach pain.
- You're feeling more tired than normal, are short of breath or feel dizzy or weak.
- You're feeling extremely sad, hopeless or have thoughts of hurting yourself or your baby.
- You experience blurred vision, excessive thirst or urination.
- You experience sudden, excessive swelling in your hands, face or feet.



What should I eat?

Every day eat nutritious foods to improve your chances of having a healthy baby.

- Fresh fruits and vegetables—5 to 9 servings
- Protein (such as chicken, turkey, pork, lean beef, eggs, nuts, beans and tofu)—2 to 3 servings
- Whole-grain cereals, breads and brown rice—8 servings
- Dairy products like milk, yogurt and cheese—3 to 4 servings
- Healthy oils like olive and canola, or those found in foods with omega-3 fatty acids (salmon or herring). But ask your health care provider about eating fish during pregnancy.
- Limit processed foods such as white bread or rice, boxed or frozen meals, fast and fried foods, and sugary items like juice, soda and candy.

During pregnancy avoid:

- Hot tubs
- Cat litter boxes
- Raw and undercooked meats and eggs
- Over-the-counter medication, unless cleared by a medical provider
- Gases and fumes like exhaust, paints, cleaning supplies
- X-rays, unless ordered by a medical provider

- Be careful not to overeat. You only need about 300 additional calories per day to nourish your baby; that is about a glass of milk and a sandwich.

Healthier fast-food choices:

- Grilled chicken instead of breaded or fried
- Fruit instead of french fries
- Fruit smoothie or water instead of a soda
- Condiments on the side (at your request)

How much weight should I gain?

Ask your provider, because this will be different for every woman. Based on your weight at the beginning of pregnancy and if you are carrying one baby, you should gain approximately:

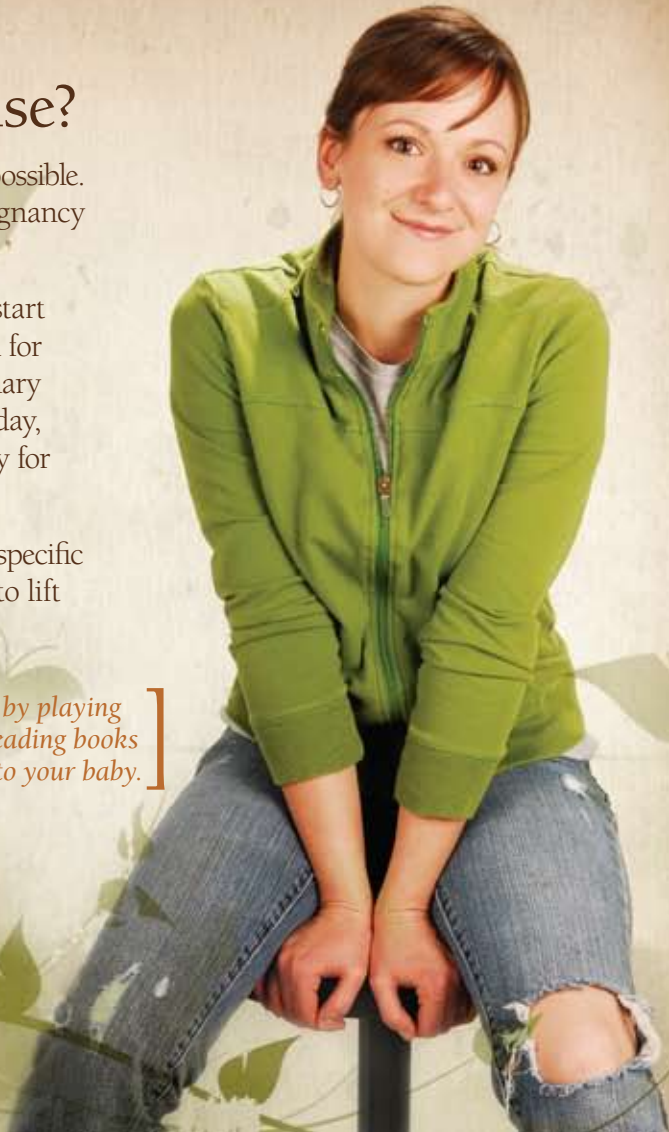
- Normal weight—25 to 35 pounds
- Underweight—28 to 40 pounds
- Overweight—15 to 25 pounds



Should I exercise?

- Absolutely—and every day if possible. Moderate exercise during pregnancy will not cause a miscarriage.
- Pregnancy is not the time to start a strenuous program, but aim for 30 minutes of walking, stationary bicycling or swimming every day, or a class designed specifically for pregnant moms.
- 7 • Talk with your provider about specific recommendations if you like to lift weights for exercise.

Bond with your baby by playing soft music, singing, reading books out loud and talking to your baby.



How will I afford this?

- If you are single and are exploring the idea of parenting, talk to your local human services or county department about your right to receive child support from the father of your baby.
- If you are considering the idea of adoption, ask your pregnancy counselor or a licensed adoption professional for more information about making an adoption plan for your baby.
- Below are some national assistance programs for health insurance, food and other support available to you and your baby:
 - Every state in the United States has a program to assist women in pregnancy. Call 800-311-BABY (800-311-2229) to be connected with a health department in your area.
 - Medicaid can assist with medical costs: www.cms.hhs.gov
 - Food stamps can be obtained from the U.S. Department of Agriculture: www.fns.usda.gov/fsp
 - Women, Infants and Children Program (WIC) has a variety of support programs: www.fns.usda.gov/wic
 - Help with your baby's medical costs can be sought through your state's health insurance program for children: 877-KIDS-NOW (877-543-7669) www.insurekidsnow.gov

Final thoughts

Whether you choose to parent or find a loving adoptive home for your baby, taking good care of yourself will give your baby the best possible start in life, and you will enjoy a healthier pregnancy. It's never too late to start taking care of yourself—and your baby.



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(all Web addresses as of 7/09)

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