

healthy lifestyle choices

Diet and exercise

The golden rule of good health can be summed up like this: Be good to your body so it will be good to you. That means eat a healthy diet and exercise regularly. Health problems are linked to weighing too much or too little before and during pregnancy. Your health is affected by what you eat and by your physical activity.

Here are a few important guidelines for healthy eating:

- Eat lots of vegetables, fruits and whole grains such as whole wheat, oats, barley and brown rice. These are excellent sources of the vitamins, minerals and dietary fiber you need every day to feel your best.
- Eat less of the foods that are high in saturated fat and cholesterol, such as meat, poultry and whole milk dairy foods (low-fat dairy is okay). Saturated fat and cholesterol are strongly linked to heart disease, cancer and obesity.

Regular physical activity helps control weight, strengthen your heart and give you more energy. It also reduces depression and relieves stress. It's a good idea to exercise at least 3 times a week for at least 30 minutes.

Alcohol and drugs

Drinking alcohol or taking any type of legal or street drugs during the early weeks of pregnancy can badly hurt your unborn baby. That's when the brain and other organs are forming.

If you drink alcohol, your unborn baby does, too. Alcohol abuse during pregnancy is a leading known cause of mental retardation. If you are considering a pregnancy, it's best to stop drinking alcohol before you conceive.

Cocaine, crack, heroin, amphetamines and other street drugs can badly hurt your baby if you use them while you are pregnant. Your baby could suffer lifelong health problems. Get help to stop using drugs before you become pregnant and stay clean.

You may be surprised to learn that more than 60 percent of all pregnancies in California are not planned. It may also be news that many birth defects and other newborn health problems occur in the first few weeks after conception—when you may not even know you're pregnant.

A baby's health is strongly linked to the mother's health before pregnancy. That's another important reason for you to stay healthy. Whether or not you're planning to get pregnant, it's important to follow these guidelines:

- Take a multi-vitamin with at least 400 micrograms of folic acid every day.
- Ask your doctor about your risk of diabetes.
- If you smoke, stop.
- Have a GYN exam annually.
- If you are being hurt by a partner or someone else, call a local shelter or crisis hot line. Also tell a health care worker you trust.
- Eat a variety of whole grains, fruits and vegetables every day and lower your intake of fat.

keep in mind...

- Walking, jogging, gardening, low-impact aerobics and swimming are good exercise.
- There is no safe level of alcohol during pregnancy. Women who drink heavily or binge drink may have babies with serious alcohol-related birth problems.
- If you need help to give up drinking or using drugs, talk with your doctor or other health care worker. They can help you find local resources.
- If you take any medicine for a medical condition, talk with your doctor before you become pregnant. Some prescription drugs and over-the-counter medicines can hurt your unborn baby.