

Planning for Pregnancy

MAKE AN INFORMED DECISION

Because you have diabetes, you need special care and advice from your diabetes doctor, nurse, and health care team before you get pregnant. Ideally, preconception counseling should be a part of every routine diabetes clinic visit for all women of child-bearing age, starting at puberty, before a woman becomes sexually active.

Preconception counseling will help you:

- prevent an unplanned pregnancy
- take care of your diabetes before and during your pregnancy to give you the best chance of having a healthy baby and preventing complications.

Are you concerned that your doctor will tell you not to get pregnant yet—or at all? Or that your diabetes educator will insist that you do more about your diabetes than you think you can? Are you tempted to just get pregnant and hope for the best?

Don't leave it up to fate. Don't be afraid to bring up the topic with your doctor and nurse. Women with diabetes can have healthy pregnancies and healthy babies if they plan ahead. Ask questions and get all the information about your health and what to expect if you get pregnant, and then make your decision.

I WANT TO HAVE A BABY. WHAT SHOULD I DO FIRST?

The steps for most women planning a pregnancy are:

- Have a rubella lab test done.
- Start taking multivitamins with folic acid and calcium.
- Stop smoking, alcohol, and drugs.
- Involve your husband or partner in the planning.
- Receive genetic counseling (optional).

Again, you will need preconception counseling and care from your health care team. When you're thinking about getting pregnant, tell your diabetes doctor and nurse so they can help you.

You'll need to get your blood glucose levels in the normal, nondiabetic range before you get pregnant. It takes a lot of work and it may take a while. So it may sound strange, but if you want to get pregnant, one of the first things to think about is birth control.

You shouldn't get pregnant until your A1C is as close to normal as possible (under 6%), without you having severe low blood glucose. A baby's organs are formed during the first six to eight weeks after conception. If your blood glucose levels are higher than normal during this time, your baby's organs might not grow right. High blood glucose could cause birth defects.

Birth defects occur more often in the infants of women with diabetes. These birth defects include heart problems, kidney problems, and spinal cord problems. Women whose diabetes is out of control are also more likely to have miscarriages and stillbirths. These risks can be greatly lowered if your blood glucose levels are within the normal range from the time you conceive. And because you never know when you'll actually conceive—be prepared and plan ahead!

Make an appointment with your doctor and nurse to let them know that you want to get pregnant. Meanwhile, keep using very effective birth control. Even if you have irregular periods, you can still get pregnant. Most birth control methods are safe for women with diabetes. Discuss with your health professionals which one is right for you.

WHO SHOULD BE ON MY HEALTH CARE TEAM?

It takes a lot of work to have the best chance of a healthy pregnancy. You'll want to get a good team together. You may be referred to a special diabetes and pregnancy team.

Your team should include:

- You, of course. Keep informed. Ask for help when you need it.
- An obstetrician who has experience treating diabetes during pregnancy.
- Your doctor.
- Diabetes educators.
- Other specialists, as needed.