

## Complete checklist before getting pregnant



### 1. Start with a preconception counseling appointment

A preconception counseling appointment is one of the most useful first steps because it turns a vague plan into a structured review. You and your clinician can talk through your menstrual history, prior pregnancies, miscarriages, surgeries, medications, allergies, family history, and any symptoms that could matter once pregnancy begins. If you have been hoping to conceive for a while, this visit can also help you decide whether any testing should happen sooner rather than later.

Bring a current list of everything you take, including prescriptions, over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, herbs, gummies, and occasional products like sleep aids or pain relievers. It also helps to note how often you drink alcohol, use nicotine or cannabis, and whether your job or home environment includes fumes, solvents, radiation, lead, or pesticides. The more complete the picture, the easier it is to make a realistic plan. If you have a personal or family history of inherited conditions, ask whether genetic counseling or carrier screening before conception is worth considering.

### 2. Review medications, vaccines, and chronic conditions early

A careful medication review before pregnancy is important because some drugs are safer than others during conception and early fetal development, and some need a gradual change rather than an abrupt stop. This includes prescriptions, nonprescription medicines, and supplements, because "natural" does not always mean pregnancy-safe. A clinician, pharmacist, or both can help assess whether a change is needed and whether the timing matters.

Checking your vaccination status before pregnancy is equally practical. Being up to date on recommended immunizations can reduce the chance of preventable infections during pregnancy, when some illnesses can affect both parent and fetus. Ask which vaccines are current, which should be given before conception, and whether any live vaccines require a waiting period before trying. If you live with a chronic condition such as diabetes, hypertension, epilepsy, asthma, thyroid disease, kidney disease, or an autoimmune disorder, the priority is chronic disease optimization before pregnancy. The safest plan is usually the one made in advance, with clear targets and follow-up.

### **3. Build nutrition and supplement habits that are easy to sustain**

Nutrition before conception does not need to be restrictive, but it should be intentional. For most people, a balanced pattern that includes enough protein, fiber, fluids, and regular meals is a better foundation than extreme dieting or skipping meals. If you are trying to lose or gain weight, gradual changes are usually safer than crash approaches, especially when cycles are irregular or energy is low.

A prenatal vitamin before pregnancy is often a convenient way to make key nutrients routine. CDC guidance highlights 400 micrograms of folic acid daily for people who may become pregnant, because folic acid helps lower the risk of certain neural tube defects. Some people need a different dose based on medical history or medications, so it is worth confirming the right amount with a healthcare professional. Exercise also belongs on the checklist: consistent moderate activity can support cardiovascular fitness, mood, and sleep. If you are already active, the main question is whether your routine feels sustainable and safe. If you are not, start with a plan you can maintain, rather than trying to overhaul everything at once.

### **4. Stop substances that can raise pregnancy risk and reduce toxic exposures**

The safest approach is to stop alcohol before conception, because early pregnancy exposure can happen before a missed period or positive test. The same is true for smoking, vaping, nicotine pouches, and recreational drugs: they are best addressed before you begin trying, when you have time to build support and replace habits that have become automatic. If stopping feels difficult, that is not a personal failure. It is a signal to ask for help early, whether through counseling, medication support, a quitline, or substance-use treatment.

Environmental exposures before conception deserve attention too. If you work with solvents, paint, cleaning chemicals, heavy metals, pesticides, or other industrial agents, ask about safer handling, ventilation, protective equipment, or temporary job modifications. Home exposures matter as well, including renovation dust, secondhand smoke, poorly ventilated hobbies, or old plumbing that may contain lead. The goal is not to create fear around every household product; it is to identify the exposures that are avoidable, to understand the ones that require protection, and to make your environment as pregnancy-ready as practical.

## **5. Plan for infections, genetics, and any condition that needs monitoring**

Some parts of preparation are deeply personal and depend on family history, test results, and your overall medical picture. If you have a known genetic condition in the family, a history of recurrent pregnancy loss, or a partner with a relevant family history, carrier screening before conception may help clarify risks and options. This is especially useful when it can be done calmly and with time to think through the results, rather than under the pressure of an unexpected pregnancy.

Your clinician may also recommend infection screening before pregnancy based on age, risk factors, previous results, or symptoms. If you have a chronic infection or another condition that requires suppression or monitoring, planning ahead can reduce surprises later. This is also the point to think through medications you use for migraines, seizures, mood disorders, autoimmune disease, or pain. The aim is not to stop treatment automatically, but to decide what should continue, what should change, and what follow-up is needed. In many cases, the best pregnancy outcome comes from stability: stable disease, stable treatment, and stable communication with your care team.

## **6. Support mental health, stress, and the practical side of trying to conceive**

Mental health planning before pregnancy is as important as blood tests or vitamins, because mood symptoms can affect sleep, substance use, adherence to medications, and the ability to sustain healthy routines. If you already work with a therapist, psychiatrist, or counselor, tell them you are planning pregnancy so treatment can be reviewed in advance. If you have a history of anxiety, depression, trauma, an eating disorder, or bipolar disorder, ask what warning signs you and your support person should watch for and what to do if symptoms flare.

Practical planning also lowers stress. Decide how you will track cycles if needed, what timing feels realistic, how you will share the plan with a partner or support person, and where you can go with questions that feel too small for an urgent visit. Sleep, workload, finances, and caregiving responsibilities all matter because conception is usually easier to manage when daily life is not running at the edge of capacity. A calm, flexible plan is often more helpful than a rigid one. If you hit a barrier, pause, reassess, and bring it back to your healthcare professional rather than trying to force the process alone.