

# Chemicals

Chemicals at home or work, such as lead, mercury, and those in garden pesticides, can create problems for men and women trying to become pregnant. They can cause miscarriages or stillbirths. To find out more about chemicals and your pregnancy, call Motherisk (416.813.6780), local environmental groups, and read the WHMIS hazardous material guidelines at your workplace.

# Tobacco

Smoking can create problems for men and women trying to become pregnant. Smoking during pregnancy is the number one cause of babies being born underweight. Being in smoke-filled places also adds to this problem. Smoking also raises the risk of bleeding and miscarriage.

Give yourself time to quit before pregnancy—the first few weeks are the hardest. A smoke-free home means your baby will have fewer breathing problems and ear infections and you'll lower the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (crib death). Being smoke-free is healthiest for everyone.

You can take charge of a drug, drinking or smoking problem. Call the local Addiction Services at ... 519.428.1805 or 905.318.5367.



# A baby's health starts before pregnancy!

**Babies start growing** well before women know they are pregnant. So the time to be aware of a "future" baby's health is before you become pregnant.

**Dads need to be healthy too.** All the information in this pamphlet can improve a man's ability to become a father and make healthy sperm for a healthy baby.

**Take the time now to learn more** about your health. Making changes before you are pregnant can mean better health for you, your baby and your family.

**Change doesn't always come easy!** But any healthy changes you make can better your chances of becoming pregnant. Just knowing that you can make a difference in your future baby's health, might urge you to read on ...

*You can talk with a public health nurse to learn more about health before pregnancy.*

**The Haldimand-Norfolk Health Unit offers many resources on this and other topics to help you lead a healthier life.**

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*Adapted with permission from Best Start, Barrie and the Simcoe County District Health Unit.*

**HealthUnit**  
Haldimand-Norfolk  
www.hnhu.org  
info@hnhu.org



**Simcoe:**  
P.O. Box 247,  
12 Gilbertson Dr.,  
Simcoe, ON N3Y 4L1  
519-426-6170 or 905.318.6623

**Caledonia:**  
282 Argyle St. S1,  
Caledonia, ON  
N3W 1K7  
905.318.5367



MATERNAL & CHILD HEALTH

# Get a Head Start



*Your Health Before Pregnancy  
Makes a Difference!*

**HealthUnit**  
Haldimand-Norfolk

## Deciding to Become a Parent?

Mixed feelings about becoming pregnant are normal. Both joys and challenges come with parenting. There will be emotional, physical, financial and career changes with becoming a parent. Talking about them with your partner and other parents will help you to cope.

## Family, Friends, Relationships

Knowing the medical history on both sides of the family is important. If you know there is a family history of mental or physical challenges, you might want to get genetic counselling before a pregnancy. See your family doctor for a referral.



Families not only pass on their genes, they are a shoulder to lean on before and during pregnancy. But sometimes relationships get too tough to handle, even for a family.

In about 40% of reported cases, abuse of women begins during the first pregnancy.

For information or help call your local women's shelter at 1.800.265.8076.

## Active Living

Being active before you or your partner become pregnant boosts your chances of having a baby who isn't underweight at birth. But try not to over do it. In rare cases, too much exercise can make it harder to become pregnant. Walking is a healthy start.

## Nutrition

A variety of fruits, vegetables, grains, dairy and protein foods help build a healthy body. Eat a diet rich in folic acid which is a vitamin in foods like dark green vegetables, corn, oranges and dried beans. Also take a **0.4 mg supplement of folic acid** every day. This key nutrient taken before becoming pregnant and during pregnancy can help prevent brain and spinal defects.



## Emotions and Feelings

Experiencing strong, negative feelings can be hard on your well-being. Getting pregnant and maintaining a pregnancy can be difficult. Depression can sometimes happen without your realizing it. About 10-25% of women and half as many men can experience depression at some point in their life. Be aware of the signs and symptoms of depression and talk to your doctor or other health care provider.

## Sleep and Stress

Most people need about seven to nine hours of sleep nightly. It's the first step to managing stress, along with exercise and healthy eating. Severe stress in men or women, can interfere with becoming pregnant. Stress is also linked to babies being born too early or underweight. Set some limits in your life. Find ways to relieve your physical stress, and talk through your emotions with others.



## Immunization, Infection and More

Certain diseases put an unborn baby at serious risk for birth defects. Women and their partners need to know whether they've had German Measles (Rubella), Chicken Pox or if they've been immunized against them. Do you know that you need to get vaccinated every 10 years for Diphtheria, Tetanus and Polio?

Another disease that can cause birth defects during pregnancy is Toxoplasmosis. It is spread through used cat litter, garden soil and uncooked meats. Women trying to become pregnant or already pregnant shouldn't change cat litter, eat raw meat, or garden without gloves. Hand washing is the number one way to keep disease from spreading.

*You and your partner should also get your blood type tested. Talk to your doctor about risks linked to blood types and having children.*

## Protect Yourself Against Sexually Transmitted Diseases

Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs), if left untreated, can often lead to infertility or problems with delivery. A person may be unaware she/he has an STD as there are often no signs or symptoms. Talk to your health care provider about testing. Protect yourself against sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV, by using a condom.

## Caffeine, Alcohol and Drugs

Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating recommends limiting your caffeine intake. Play it safe. Cut back on all sources of caffeine, not just coffee. Tea, pop, chocolate—even some over-the-counter medicines have it. Read labels.



Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about any over-the-counter, prescription drugs or herbal remedies you use. They may make it harder to become pregnant or cause problems while a baby is growing inside mom.

If you drink, limit alcohol intake while you are planning a pregnancy. **No amount of alcohol is safe during pregnancy.** It's the leading cause of preventable mental retardation in children.

Some illegal drugs can lead to difficulties in getting pregnant and cause birth defects and learning problems in children.