

By Kate Neale Cooper

pregnancy

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From antibiotics (are they safe during pregnancy?) to getting more z's when you're big as a house (yes, you can!), an up-to-the-minute encyclopedia for the mom-to-be.



Antibiotics

As many as 50 percent of spontaneous preterm births are associated with infections, including sexually transmitted diseases such as chlamydia and bacterial vaginosis, as well as urinary tract and gum infections. If you're diagnosed with a bacterial infection, your doctor will probably prescribe a pregnancy-safe antibiotic. Take it as directed and finish the full course.

Body Mass Index (BMI)

Your prepregnancy BMI determines how much weight you should put on during pregnancy. "These guidelines are widely accepted," says Naomi Stotland, M.D., an assistant professor of obstetrics and gynecology at the University of California, San Francisco. To calculate your BMI and learn your recommended weight gain, visit fitpregnancy.com/weightgain.

Call your doctor or midwife

...if you experience:

- > Sudden swelling in your hands, legs or feet
- > Vaginal bleeding (see "Spotting," pg. 64)
- > Fever and/or chills
- > Severe headache
- > A sudden gush or a slow trickle of fluid from the vagina
- > Lack of or sudden changes in fetal movement in the third trimester (see "Quickening," pg. 64)
- > Nausea or vomiting so severe that you can't eat or drink
- > Burning or itching when you urinate
- > Abdominal pain
- > Vision changes

First-trimester screening

First-trimester Down syndrome screening involves an ultrasound to measure the area at the back of the fetus's neck (nuchal translucency) and a simple test of the mother's blood. The advantage is that it isn't invasive and can't cause a miscarriage. But it's not perfect. "This is a screening test, not a diagnostic one," explains Nicole Karjane, M.D., an assistant professor at Virginia Commonwealth University Medical Center. "A positive screen means the risk that the child has Down syndrome is higher, and a negative screen means the risk is lower." That information can help you decide whether to go ahead with chorionic villus sampling (CVS), performed at 10 to 12 weeks, or amniocentesis, done at 15 to 18 weeks. First-trimester screening also can't detect fetal neural-tube defects, such as spina bifida.

Diabetes

High blood sugar during pregnancy, or gestational diabetes, affects 5 to 8 percent of expectant women. Whenever the onset, mothers-to-be with diabetes are at risk for birth defects, preterm delivery, too-large babies and stillbirth. But a federal study showed that taking multivitamins before conception and during early pregnancy may reduce the risk for birth defects in babies of diabetic moms.

Exercise

Regular exercise can help prevent certain pregnancy complications and excessive weight gain; ease complaints such as soreness and stiffness; build strength for labor and for taking care of your baby; and even provide long-term health benefits for your child. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists recommends that pregnant women get 30 minutes of exercise a day (there are exceptions, so be sure to get your doc's or midwife's OK first). Breaking up your activity into three 10-minute or two 15-minute segments will work just as well. Go to fitpregnancy.com for safe workouts.

Group B strep

Universal screening for a bacterial infection called Group B strep (GBS), which used to be the No. 1 cause of infection in newborns and a significant cause of uterine infections in new moms, has drastically reduced its incidence. Your OB or midwife will take a swab of your vagina and rectum at 35 to 37 weeks. If you carry GBS (10 percent to 30 percent of pregnant women do), you will be treated with antibiotics during delivery, unless you are having a planned C-section.

Herbal remedies

A commentary published in *Obstetrics & Gynecology* said that there is "no scientific basis" for the belief that herbal medicines are safe during pregnancy. (Among the few exceptions are certain herbal teas, including chamomile, Sleepytime from Celestial Seasonings, lavender or lemon balm.) "I ask patients, 'What is this remedy doing for you that might make it worth the chance that it's dangerous?'" says Deanne Williams, C.N.M., a former executive director of the American College of Nurse-Midwives.



Iron

Iron is one of the ingredients in red blood cells. Anemia, a condition in which the number and size of your red blood cells falls below normal, is common during pregnancy. Anemic women are more likely to become tired and out of breath, and iron deficiency has been linked to an increased risk of preterm birth and low birth weight. Most women have trouble getting enough iron through diet alone, so take a prenatal vitamin that includes iron.

The john

Frequent bathroom visits during pregnancy are annoying but can help prevent a urinary tract infection (UTI), the most common infection in pregnancy and one that can lead to a more serious kidney infection or preterm labor. That's why your doctor or midwife "dips" your urine at every visit to test for a UTI (many pregnant women have no symptoms). Help avoid infections altogether with these tips:

- > Urinate after having sex.
- > Drink lots of water to "flush out" your urinary tract.
- > Empty your bladder frequently.
- > When urinating during early pregnancy, lean forward to allow your bladder to empty completely; later, lift your belly.
- > Call your doctor or midwife if you experience pain or burning when urinating, feel the need to pee again right after going, have blood in your urine or a fever.



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Kegels

Done frequently enough, these exercises that strengthen the pelvic-floor muscles will help prevent urine leaks and may reduce your chance of needing an episiotomy. Whether or not Kegels can improve sexual function remains a mystery. "That's hard to measure," explains Jerri Hobdy, C.N.M., of Greater Philadelphia Health Action, Inc. "But it probably does." To do Kegels, slowly tighten and lift the muscles you use to stop the flow of urine. Repeat 10 to 20 times; do three sets a day.

Libido

Some pregnant women are relieved not to have to worry about birth control; others find pregnancy downright sexy. But for many women, pregnancy can be a libido-sapping experience, at least during the first trimester. "A lot of women say, 'I'm just too tired,'" explains Williams. "It's not a rejection of your partner and it's not forever, but women should pause and think, 'I'm sending lots of rejection messages. What can I do to make up for that?'" Orgasm will not trigger labor if your body's not ready to be in labor, says Williams.

Morning sickness

Nausea and vomiting affect 70 percent to 85 percent of pregnant women. "The good news is that babies are parasites, so they're usually getting what they need even if you don't," jokes Karjane. (Having morning sickness is also associated with a lower miscarriage risk, though most women who do not suffer from it have normal, healthy pregnancies.) Treating symptoms as soon as they surface may stop them from progressing to more severe hyperemesis, which often requires hospitalization. In fact, a University of Toronto study found that women who had experienced morning sickness in a previous pregnancy benefited from taking anti-nausea drugs as soon as they found out they were pregnant instead of waiting for symptoms to resurface. If your nausea is severe, your doctor may prescribe medication, but try these simple suggestions first:

- > Drink lots of fluids.
- > Eat frequent, smaller meals; incorporate lemon and ginger flavors.
- > Try a different prenatal supplement.
- > Try over-the-counter remedies such as Emetrol, accupressure wristbands, or vitamin B₆.

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Neural-tube defects

To help prevent neural-tube defects (NTDs) such as spina bifida as well as cleft palate and some heart defects, all women between the ages of 15 and 45 should take at least 400 micrograms of the B vitamin folic acid daily. If your prenatal vitamin upsets your stomach, take folic acid by itself. Some women, including those with seizure disorders and women who themselves had an NTD or a previously affected pregnancy, should increase the dosage to 4,000 micrograms (4 milligrams) of the vitamin daily. Diabetics and obese women might also benefit from this higher dosage.

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Quickening

You will probably first notice your baby's movements—“quickening”—around 20 weeks (sooner if you've been pregnant before, later if you're tall). In your third trimester, your OB or midwife may ask you to do a daily kick count, which tracks those movements. “Kick counts are a good way of reassuring you that the baby is OK,” Hobby says. (For details, go to fitpregnancy.com/kickcounts.)

Oral health

For years, experts have been aware of an association between periodontal (gum) disease and preterm labor. Research is now beginning to show that pregnant women who have gum disease are also at risk of stillbirth and delivering babies with low birth weight. A study found that a nonsurgical dental procedure called scaling and planing did not reduce the chance of preterm birth for women at risk because of gum disease; more aggressive types of treatment may be necessary. Visit your dentist and, if necessary, a periodontist as part of your preconception planning or as early in your pregnancy as possible.

Partner

At least one study has found that moms who have the support of a companion during labor and delivery experience fewer complications during childbirth and less postpartum depression. Another showed that women who weren't happy with the amount of emotional support they received during the second trimester had lower-birth-weight babies. Some tips for involving your partner from the very beginning:

- ▶ Schedule prenatal visits around a meal so that you can use a lunch or dinner date to talk about the doctor's visit.
- ▶ Attend childbirth and parenting classes together. They fill up fast, so register early at your hospital or birthing center.
- ▶ Have him help get ready for the baby's arrival by taking on tasks that interest him, whether it's researching the best car seats or stocking the freezer with his favorite recipes.

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Relax!

You may worry that anxiety about your pregnancy or other issues will harm your baby, but a Johns Hopkins University study concluded that there is no direct association between normal anxiety and pregnancy outcome. Severe or chronic stress can contribute to preterm birth, however. Psychotherapy and pregnancy-safe medications can help.

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Spotting

Bleeding during pregnancy is scary but common, especially in the first trimester. If you experience spotting or heavier bleeding, call your doctor or midwife right away and be prepared to describe it to her: what color it is, when it started, etc. Bleeding can be caused by everything from the embryo's implantation in the uterus to intercourse or—unfortunately—miscarriage. The good news is, more than half of all women who experience spotting in early pregnancy go on to deliver full-term babies. If you're bleeding so much that you are changing a pad every hour, or if you feel lightheaded or experience other signs of anemia, go straight to the ER.

Travel

“The recommendations on traveling while pregnant vary depending on your medical history, the point you are in pregnancy and the mechanics of the trip,” says Williams. “If I have a patient in her third trimester, I ask her to weigh the necessity of the trip against her willingness to have her baby wherever it is she's going.” If you are showing and planning to have her baby wherever it is she's “prescription” approving you for air travel up until the appropriate date. Also, carry a copy of your medical records with you, just in case.



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Ultrasounds

Ultrasound can be an invaluable tool for diagnosing problems and monitoring fetal development. In most cases, the benefits of a low-level ultrasound exam performed at a doctor's office outweigh the risks, but the same cannot be said for keepsake ultrasounds done at your local mall. In fact, the Food and Drug Administration in 2002 ruled that performing an ultrasound without a doctor's prescription is illegal.

Workplace rights

Before you announce your pregnancy, learn your rights under the Family & Medical Leave Act by checking out the U.S. Department of Labor's website (dol.gov). And keep in mind that the Pregnancy Discrimination Act requires employers to treat pregnancy like any other medical condition. For example, if you're temporarily unable to do your job because of pregnancy complications, your boss has to provide you with modified tasks, different assignments, disability leave or leave without pay. For more details, visit eoc.com.



X-rays

Wondering whether exposing your baby to radiation—even small amounts—is worth the potential risk? "If the X-ray is medically necessary, I'd say, 'Do it,'" says Louis K. Wagner, Ph.D., a professor of radiology at the University of Texas Medical School at Houston. "If there is any doubt and if the procedure involves the abdomen, perhaps a second opinion should be requested." Try to have dental X-rays before you get pregnant or after you deliver.

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Yoga

A study that compared pregnant women who walked for half an hour twice a day to those who practiced yoga for an hour a day found that the latter had fewer complications, including pregnancy-induced hypertension and preterm delivery. "Yoga also helps decrease some of the common discomforts of pregnancy, such as back pain and sciatica, and helps build the strength and endurance you'll need for labor and delivery," says Marcy White, a registered nurse and certified childbirth educator who teaches prenatal yoga.

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Vaccinations

Pregnant women are at an increased risk for influenza complications, and guidelines call for all women who will be expecting during flu season (usually November through April) to get a flu shot. The nasal-spray flu vaccine and other live-virus vaccines are not recommended for pregnant women. Expectant women are also urged to receive the H1N1 flu virus (aka "swine flu") vaccine.



Z's

A study conducted at the University of California, San Francisco, School of Nursing found that women who slept fewer than six hours per night in the last weeks of pregnancy labored for an average of 11 hours longer and were 4.5 times more likely to have a C-section than women who slept more than seven hours. Try meditation, prenatal yoga or other relaxation techniques and eating tryptophan-rich foods such as turkey, milk and bananas. For more tips, go to fitpregnancy.com/sleep.

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