

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

# Lifestyle Changes and Pregnancy

Your lifestyle can affect the health of your future baby, even prior to conception. Because your developing baby will entirely depend on your body for nourishment and protection, it is wise to alter your lifestyle prior to conception so that you eliminate any bad habits or risk factors that might compromise your health.

**Avoid Toxins.** Many parts of your daily routine that you engage in without a second thought can be quite harmful to your developing baby. You will endanger your developing fetus, for instance, if you smoke, or drink alcohol, or use certain drugs, including certain prescription medications your doctor may have recommended! Although you may take it for granted that these are safe in moderation, they have a much more powerful and negative effect on a developing fetus than they do on a full-grown adult. In addition to stopping smoking drinking alcohol, and using any recreational drugs prior to getting pregnant, you should also meet with your doctor to review all the prescription medications you are currently taking to determine whether they are safe for you to continue to use during pregnancy. The topic of what to avoid while pregnant is covered in greater detail below in the section titled "Universal Precautions".

**Prenatal Vitamins.** Your baby requires vitamins and minerals in order to develop properly. Various serious birth defects can occur if you allow yourself to develop a vitamin deficiency while pregnant. For this reason doctors recommend that pregnant women take a prenatal vitamin supplement. You may want to consider taking prenatal vitamins even before you become pregnant so as to prepare your body for the demands of pregnancy.

One important advantage to taking prenatal supplements before you become pregnant is the inclusion of folic acid in these supplements. It is particularly important that your body have enough folic acid on board during the early part of your pregnancy because folic acid prevents a very serious developmental complication called a neural tube defect from occurring. Pregnant women and those women hoping to become pregnant soon should take between 800 and 1,000 micrograms of folic acid each day.

Prenatal multi-vitamins are available either with a prescription or over-the-counter like regular vitamins. As both types of vitamins provide the same benefit, the only advantage to obtaining your vitamins through a prescription is that your insurance company may pay for their cost that way.

Keep in mind that prenatal vitamins are intended to supplement a healthy diet, not to replace it! The vitamin you take will not provide all of the vitamins and minerals you need to ensure a healthy pregnancy. For example, prenatal vitamins do not contain the total amount of calcium a pregnant woman needs. You will still need to eat a healthy and nutritious diet to support your health and your baby's health.

Be aware of the fact that some women experience nausea while using prenatal vitamins. This nausea can contribute to the symptoms of morning sickness and make you feel very uncomfortable. You may need to eat food before taking your vitamins to avoid the nausea. If that trick doesn't work, or is counter-indicated by your doctor's instructions or warnings on the vitamins you are taking, you might try changing to a different brand of vitamin to see if you tolerate that one better. Speak to your doctor if you think your prenatal vitamins are causing your symptoms.

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