

## **Unplanned Pregnancy: A Good Reason to Stay Healthy**

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Every year, half of the women who become pregnant in the United States have not planned to do so. This means that being in the best health possible—just in case you become pregnant—is important for all women of reproductive age.

Whether you are a teenager or are approaching menopause, if you don't want to have a baby right now, make sure you talk to your physician or nurse practitioner about the most effective contraception that is right for you. Kaiser Permanente has several types of very effective contraceptive products that are readily available without a co-pay, including injections and intrauterine devices. In addition, women who are interested in permanent sterilization may want to learn more about a newer and less invasive surgery that can be performed in the office.

Since so many pregnancies are unplanned or mistimed, it makes sense to take some steps to improve your health in case you become pregnant. Thinking now about how you can prepare your body is a good start. This includes taking folic acid to help prevent certain birth defects. I recommend that all women between 15 and 45 years of age take a multivitamin with folic acid every day.

If you have a chronic disease such as diabetes, hypertension, seizure disorders, depression, or kidney disease, make sure to ask your doctor about the impact of your illness should you become pregnant, as well as about any of the medications you take. Some of these illnesses and some medications can increase the risk of having a baby with birth defects.

Women who are 25 or younger should be screened for chlamydia every year. This can be done through a visit to one of our teen clinics or to our obstetrics and gynecology clinics, or a urine test can be done in the laboratory. Chlamydia is the most common sexually transmitted disease (STD) in the United States.

Staying healthy for the sake of possible future pregnancies is another reason to quit smoking, to drink less caffeine and alcohol, and to maintain a healthy weight. Conveniently, these healthy behaviors that keep you in better shape to have a healthy baby are also the right things to do for your own long-term health.