

Taking Care of Yourself and Your Baby

CARE INSTRUCTIONS

Get regular prenatal check-ups to protect your health and the health of your baby.

During your prenatal care visits, the doctor, nurse practitioner, or nurse midwife will check your health and the health of your growing baby. At each appointment, the practitioner will ask important questions. Be completely honest so that he or she can give you the best possible care and medical advice.

Take care of yourself with a healthy diet and regular exercise.

If you're physically active on most days of the week, great! If not, this is a good time to start a gentle exercise program. You'll feel better overall, have more energy, sleep better, and have fewer pregnancy symptoms like constipation and water retention. For most people, it's fine to do moderate exercise throughout the pregnancy. Begin slowly and build up gradually; a five-minute walk is a good start. Try to work up to exercising at least 30 minutes every day. Wear athletic shoes and comfortable clothing. Drink 8 to 10 glasses of fluid each day. Drink extra water before, during, and after exercise. Check with your doctor to learn which exercises are safe.

Your baby needs good nutrition for healthy development. Although you're eating for two now, that doesn't mean eating twice as much. Eat plenty of the right kinds of foods. Sodas, candy bars, and other "junk foods" are not good for you or your baby. It's up to you to make good food choices for your own health and the health of your growing baby.

Choose milk, fruits and vegetables, fish, lean meats, and whole grain foods (e.g. whole wheat bread) every day. Most women who are already at a healthy weight should gain 25 to 35 pounds during pregnancy. But if you were overweight before becoming pregnant, your doctor will probably recommend that you gain less. Still, this is not the time to diet. Your doctor can tell you more about the foods you should eat.

Take recommended amounts of folic acid.

Folic Acid is a vitamin that has been shown to help prevent some kinds of birth defects such as spinal bifida and neural tube defects. It is best to take folic acid before you get pregnant. But if you didn't, it's important to take it during the early weeks of your pregnancy. Make sure your diet includes green leafy vegetables and legumes (foods that contain folic acid). Take a multivitamin or folic acid supplement containing 0.4 mg of folate, or prenatal vitamins your doctor recommends.

Do not smoke during your pregnancy.

If you smoke, try to stop now—for your health and your baby's. Women who smoke are more likely to have problems in pregnancy and childbirth. They tend to have premature and smaller (underdeveloped)

babies who have problems after birth and throughout life. The risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), or "crib death," increases if a mother smokes during or after pregnancy. Quitting smoking is the best thing you can do for your baby's health. Kaiser Permanente has lots of resources to help you through it.

Avoid alcohol and drugs.

If you drink alcohol or use drugs like cocaine and crack during pregnancy, you'll harm your baby. These drugs can cause your newborn to cry a lot or have problems eating, sleeping, or breathing. Later, the baby may have trouble learning. Alcohol and other drugs can cause more serious problems, like birth defects or brain damage. They can even cause you to lose your pregnancy.

Check with your doctor before taking any prescription or over-the-counter medications, even things like aspirin or cough syrup. *No matter what your friends do or say, don't take any drug while you are pregnant unless your doctor or nurse practitioner who knows you are pregnant tells you it's okay to do so.*

Use a seatbelt.

You need to wear a seatbelt to protect you and your baby every time you drive or ride in a car. Use both the lap belt and the shoulder harness. Position the lap belt low, below the baby (not across your stomach or on your uterus).

Other Resources

Use these Kaiser Permanente resources for reliable health information:

- ❖ Connect to our Web site at kp.org to access health and drug encyclopedias, interactive programs, health classes, and much more.
- ❖ Check your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*.
- ❖ Contact your local Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for health information, programs, or other resources.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult your doctor. If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse any brand names; any similar products may be used. Herbs and supplements are sold over-the-counter. Kaiser Permanente carries only herb categories for which some evidence exists to show that the herbs may be effective to treat certain medical conditions.