

Baronscourt Surgery
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Preconception – Things to Consider Before you Become Pregnant



Folic Acid

There is now good evidence to show that taking 400 mcg of folic acid per day when becoming pregnant reduces the risk of neural tube disorders such as spina bifida. In women who have had a previous pregnancy affected by this condition or who are diabetic, or epileptic and on medication, this should be increased to 5 mg per day.

Drugs

Both prescribed and recreational drugs can affect fertility and cause problems for pregnancy. If you are taking regular medication you should discuss this with your GP or Midwife before getting pregnant. Heavy use of painkillers such as Ibuprofen is best avoided as they can interfere with ovulation. Try Paracetamol instead. Cannabis, cocaine and anabolic steroids are known to significantly reduce sperm count. Cannabis can also affect ovulation in women.

Smoking

Smoking is detrimental to a woman's fertility. It also increases the incidence of miscarriage. For men smoking reduces sperm count by 15% and also reduces sperm motility. It would be sensible to give up smoking for the health benefits.

Alcohol

Women should limit their alcohol intake to no more than 1-2 units per day as alcohol can affect foetal development. Recent evidence suggests that even moderate drinkers (up to 14 units per week) have half the fertility of non-drinkers.

Foods to Avoid

Certain foods should be avoided in pregnancy as they carry a higher risk of infection, which could have a serious effect on your unborn baby. The listeria bacterium is found in mould ripened cheese, such as stilton and brie, unpasteurised dairy products, fresh pates prewashed bags of salads and soft ice cream from vans.

Salmonella and toxoplasmosis can be prevented if you avoid the following foods, undercooked meats, cured meat such as Parma ham, undercooked eggs and fish and unwashed fruit and vegetables. High levels of Vitamin A can cause birth defects and therefore liver should be avoided.

Food Hygiene

You are much more vulnerable to food poisoning when pregnant, so always ensure good hygiene in the kitchen. Keep separate chopping boards for raw and cooked foods. Always ensure that reheated food is piping hot before eating.

Toxoplasmosis

Toxoplasmosis is caused by a parasite and can be caught by eating infected food or by handling cat faeces. If you have cats, wear rubber gloves when cleaning their litter tray or get someone else to do the job for you.

Rubella

This can cause serious birth defects if a woman is infected during early pregnancy. It is important to have your immunity checked by a blood test before becoming pregnant. You may have been vaccinated against rubella at school but your immunity may be low. You can be vaccinated against rubella but must not become pregnant for 1 to 3 months following vaccination.