

Planning for Pregnancy

BECOMING A FATHER

Background

Men are important in the creation of a baby. The health of a new baby is influenced by men as well as women. New studies are reporting that a man's health at the time of conception has more of an effect on the health of the baby than previously thought. If you are healthy before you make a baby, then you are more likely to have a healthy baby.

How the Father Affects Pregnancy

Your behaviors and attitudes can have an affect on your partner's pregnancy. For example, exposing your partner to secondhand smoke during her pregnancy is just as harmful to the developing baby as if she were smoking herself. If you smoke, consider quitting or smoke outdoors as far away from your partner as possible. Stress can also have a negative effect on the pregnancy. Women who experience stress may be more likely to deliver a baby too early or too small. Having a positive and supportive attitude can make a real difference in the health of your baby.

How Pregnancy Affects the Father

Pregnancy can be both a joyful and stressful time. Men can sometimes feel left out, but you can play an active role in the pregnancy. Talk with your partner about the pregnancy and plans for the baby. Learn about the changes that your partner will be going through during the pregnancy. Take classes together to prepare for the birth of your baby. Being an active participant will allow you to be better prepared to support each other and prepare for the birth of your baby.

Your Health

Some factors that can affect a man's ability to conceive a healthy baby include:

- Diabetes
- Excessive use of alcohol or drugs
- High blood pressure
- Some genetic conditions
- Stress
- Smoking cigarettes
- Unhealthy diet

The Health of Your Sperm

The health of a man's sperm is just as important as the health of a woman's egg. The health of your sperm, whether it be a low sperm count or quality of sperm, could be affected by:

- Age — studies have shown a link between older fathers and increased incidence of autism
- Childhood conditions or illnesses, such as undescended testicles or mumps
- Environmental hazards at work or home
- Overheated testicles caused by exposure to high heat (hot tubs or saunas) or clothing that is too tight
- Some prescription, non-prescription and herbal medicines

What You Can Do

- 1) *Maintain good physical health.*
- 2) *Talk with your health care provider about your health conditions and medications.*
- 3) *Ask family members about a history of birth defects or any genetic conditions.*
- 4) *Talk with your partner about any concerns or feelings you have about becoming a father.*



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