

PregnancyToday

10 Tips for Expectant Moms from a Midwife

Elizabeth Stein, CNM, MSN, MPH, founder of AskYourMidwife.com, offers these top tips for expectant mothers:

- 1. Vitamins:** Take prenatal vitamins with folic acid and essential fatty acids, starting two to three months before conception (when you start having unprotected sex in order to get pregnant). Take at least 800 micrograms of folic acid per day. Folic acid prevents open neural tube defects such as spina bifida. The neural tube closes approximately day 24 of pregnancy. Also take a supplement of essential fatty acids (omega-3, 6 and 9) each day. Essential fatty acids can be found in many foods, but have been added to most prenatal vitamins. They have been shown to be good for babies' brain and eye development, as well as moms.
- 2. Dental Health:** Have a dental check up prior to conception to make sure there are no infections in your mouth. This is important because bacteria in your mouth may cause preterm labor and preterm delivery (premature baby).
- 3. Clean Living:** Don't smoke, drink alcohol or use street drugs. Cigarettes expose the embryo/fetus to over 200 toxic chemicals which can interfere with the growth of the baby, causing the blood vessels to constrict. This constriction of the blood vessels causes an increase in blood pressure and a decrease in oxygen and nutrients going to the developing fetus.
- 4. Sleep:** Once pregnant, rest as much as possible. During pregnancy you should not take any sleeping medication, but you can have a glass of warm milk to help you relax. Seven to eight hours of restful sleep every night is usually sufficient, although sometimes your body wants more sleep. A nap during the day or late afternoon will provide a wonderful "pick me up."
- 5. Stay Hydrated:** Drink lots of water. At least two quarts of water a day is recommended. If dehydration occurs during pregnancy, it can cause your mouth to feel dry and your uterus may cramp, which is very concerning when pregnant. Also, avoid adding salt and sugar to anything you eat or drink.
- 6. Watch your weight:** A pregnant woman's goal should be to gain no more than 25 to 35 pounds. Being pregnant is not a license to pig out and gain 40 to 50 pounds or more. Nutrition during pregnancy is very important and a meeting with a nutritionist can be helpful. Try to eat three servings of protein a day (3 ounces each, about the size of a credit card). All protein should be thoroughly cooked. Also, eat lots of fruits and vegetables. Carbohydrates are important too since they are the energy food (bread, rice, potatoes, pasta). Average calories per day should be 1800 to 2000 and that includes the 300 extra for the pregnancy (per fetus).
- 7. Eat Small Regular Meals:** Eat and drink within a half hour of waking and then every three hours (five to six small meals per day rather than three big meals). You need to have a continuous intake of food (known as grazing) so your body can break it down to provide glucose to your pregnancy on a continuous basis. If you don't eat small, frequent meals you will feel very light headed (hypoglycemic).
- 8. Office Visits:** Find a midwife (or physician) you are comfortable with and keep your appointments.

9. **Stay Informed:** Bring a written list of questions to every visit. Questions may be whatever concerns you. Be sure to discuss your expectations for labor and delivery (natural, vaginal, epidural, Cesarean delivery) and breastfeeding.

10. **Know who will deliver you!** Ask who will be delivering your baby. Will it be the midwife or physician you see every visit or someone else in the practice? Sometimes midwives and physicians have cross coverage among practices, so it is important to ask these questions and not assume your midwife or physician will be there on delivery day.

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