



Frequently Asked Questions about Planning for Pregnancy

How long do I need to wait to get pregnant after going off the Pill?

Medically, there is no risk to the pregnancy if you conceive in your first cycle off oral contraceptives. Because ovulation can be irregular in the months following pill use, many physicians recommend waiting for 3-4 months to allow your cycles to become reestablished. This may make it easier for you to follow your cycles and time intercourse, but it is not absolutely necessary.

I've been on the Pill for 10 years; will it be harder for me to get pregnant?

Irregular ovulation is common in the first 6 months after stopping oral contraceptives. However, after this six-month time frame, fertility rates are the same as for women who have never been on the pill.

How do I know if I'm ovulating?

Women, who have regular periods with predictable flow and no bleeding between periods, are in all likelihood ovulating normally. It is helpful to keep a menstrual diary to be able to determine when ovulation occurs. Your period will start 14 days after you ovulate, if fertilization did not occur.

When is my most fertile time of the month? I've heard it's "two weeks after my period".

You are most likely to conceive if you time intercourse around ovulation. In a perfect 28-day cycle (with day one being the first day of your period), ovulation would occur on day 14. However, in women with longer cycles, for example, a 34-day cycle, ovulation may not occur until day 20. (i.e. 14 days before the start of the following period).

How often should I have intercourse?

It is recommended to have intercourse every day to every other day during the week of ovulation.

How many months should it take to conceive?

Statistically, 85% of healthy couples will conceive within one year of regular unprotected intercourse. This is considered normal fertility. Don't worry if you do not conceive on the first try. If you have a history of previous gynecologic problems, or other medical issues that you are concerned may impact your fertility, you can discuss these with your doctor.

Should I buy an ovulation predictor kit? What about recording body temperature?

If you and your partner are in good health, it is probably less stressful to "let nature take its course" for a few months and see if you conceive without the added pressure of kits and thermometers.

Initially, simply keeping an accurate menstrual diary may be just as helpful in trying to predict when you will ovulate during your next cycle, and involves a lot less effort.

Ovulation predictor kits try to detect the surge in hormones that occur just prior to ovulation.

They are also fairly expensive. If you do decide to use one, we recommend Clear Plan Easy. Basal Body Temperature testing involves taking your temperature upon awakening each morning. The lowest temperature measurement occurs approximately 48 hrs prior to ovulation.

Some women have found it helpful to examine their cervical mucus to learn their cycle patterns. Cervical mucus during the ovulatory phase should be clear, thin, and elastic. After ovulation has passed, the mucus becomes thicker, darker, and more “sticky”.

When is the earliest I can find out that I am pregnant?

A urine home pregnancy test will be positive 1 day after a missed period. A blood test will be positive as early as 12 days after conception.

When is the soonest I can conceive again after my last baby? A miscarriage?

It is possible to conceive as soon as 6 weeks after delivery, even while breastfeeding. If you have a pregnancy loss, it is best to wait for at least one normal period before trying again so that the uterine lining may cleanse itself.

What should my husband/partner be doing?

He should maintain a well balanced diet. He should see his physician for a check-up, especially if he has any longstanding medical illnesses. Avoid alcohol and marijuana use, as both of these are associated with decreased sperm counts. Cigarette smoking and certain medications may also effect his reproductive health. It is commonly thought that excessive heat (e.g. associated with hot tubs, jockey shorts, fevers) may temporarily decrease sperm count.

Your Health and Preparing for Pregnancy

Should I change my diet while I am trying to conceive? What about vitamins?

Increasing your intake of folic acid (also known as folate) to 0.4 mg per day to help prevent neural tube defects. Many women find it convenient to do this by taking prenatal vitamins, or standard multivitamins. If you have a family history of neural tube defects (spina bifida, or other openings in the spine or cranium), or are on seizure medications, you may need more folic acid.

Otherwise, simply maintain a well balanced diet with fruits and vegetables, calcium sources, and lean protein.

Should I stop drinking alcohol? What about caffeine?

Large amounts of alcohol ingested in the first trimester are associated with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. For this reason, the most conservative recommendation would be to stop alcohol intake when you begin trying to conceive. If you do continue alcohol consumption, it should be in minimal amounts.

Caffeine has not been associated with birth defects. However, there are some studies that suggest that heavy caffeine use (>3 cups day) is associated with longer interval to conception and increased risk of miscarriage.

Can I exercise? What if I want to lose weight before getting pregnant?

You can exercise as tolerated. Once pregnant, it is recommended that you do not exercise to exhaustion. A rule of thumb is not exercise if you can't carry on a normal conversation while you exercise. Regarding weight loss, binge dieting or diet pills are not appropriate when trying to conceive.

Eliminating high fat/high sugar foods with gradual weight loss is fine. Maintain your intake of fruits, vegetables, grains and other healthy foods.

I am basically healthy, should I worry about any medical issues before trying to conceive?

There is now a chicken pox (varicella) vaccine available for those who have never had the disease. If you had chicken pox as a child, you are already immune. If you have never had chicken pox or are unsure if you have been exposed to chicken pox, a blood test can determine your immunity. You may also want to confirm immunity to Rubella (German Measles). If you need these vaccines, the manufacturers recommend delaying conception for three months following administration. If you have not had Tdap (Tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis) within 10 years, you should have a booster shot. Additionally, you should consider the hepatitis B vaccine. Any of these vaccines can be obtained at the Los Olivos vaccination clinic by appointment (408) 356-9500.

I am over 35. Should I be concerned about special risks?

More and more women are getting pregnant in their late thirties. In this group there is a somewhat higher incidence of high blood pressure and gestational diabetes. You will be screened for this during your prenatal visits. With regard to genetic issues for the baby, there is a correlation with increasing age and risk of genetic defects. At age 35 women are offered amniocentesis to analyze the baby's chromosomes if they desire. Most women also undergo a non-invasive nuchal translucency screening to determine whether they are at higher risk for a baby with Down syndrome (Trisomy 21) or Trisomy 18.

Prenatal diagnosis can involve complex decisions for every couple. Unfortunately, there is no test that can predict every abnormality. Genetic counseling is offered if you are over 35 or have a family history of a genetic disorder.

What about inherited conditions or conditions related to my ethnic background?

If you have a family history of a specific condition or syndrome you are concerned about, genetic counseling is available to help you determine any inheritance patterns and testing needs. There are conditions associated with various ethnic backgrounds that are screened for in pregnancy by blood tests. Some couples elect to have this screening performed ahead of time.

Background conditions that can be screened for include: African American Sickle Cell Anemia, Mediterranean, Middle Eastern, Thalassemia (a form of anemia), Ashkenazi Jewish population testing and Cystic Fibrosis (1/1600 prevalence in Caucasian population).

I have diabetes/thyroid disease/asthma/high blood pressure. Does this matter?

It is best to optimize your health as you go into pregnancy, especially longstanding conditions. Some medications (e.g. some blood pressure medicines, oral diabetes medicines) should not be used in pregnancy. See your internist/primary physician and let them know you are planning to conceive. Blood work and medications can then be updated accordingly.

Early Pregnancy Questions

When should I schedule my first OB appointment?

At 8-10 weeks of pregnancy. Call sooner if you are experiencing problems. (e.g. bleeding or unusual pain). Information about pregnancy is available on the Los Olivos website.

I have had a miscarriage in the past, does this mean I may miscarry again? What should I do?

First trimester miscarriages are extremely common. A single uncomplicated miscarriage should not lessen your chances of carrying the next pregnancy. Speak to your doctor about any additional tests that may be recommended if you have had multiple miscarriages.

I have had some spotting since my positive pregnancy test. Should I be worried?

About one in three pregnant women will spot in the first trimester especially after intercourse or vigorous exercise. This is not always associated with miscarriage and may occur with a normal pregnancy. If this spotting is associated with abdominal or pelvic pain, call your physician.