



Family Planning for Women With a Chronic Illness

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If you're among the growing number of women with a chronic illness who want to start a family, you may be worried about how your condition may impact your pregnancy, your baby, and your health. It's normal to ask yourself questions such as: Will my baby be okay? What will happen to me if my healthcare provider needs to adjust or even stop some of my medicines? Am I strong enough physically to raise a baby? Whether you have a gastrointestinal condition, diabetes, arthritis, or one of a number of other chronic conditions, there are things you can do to help you before (and during) your pregnancy.

Making the Decision to Start a Family

The decision to start a family may be a difficult one for many couples who are dealing with a chronic condition. It can be even more difficult if there is a chance that the chronic condition can be passed to the baby.

If you or your healthcare team are unsure about your ability to have a healthy pregnancy, or if you choose not to become pregnant, there are other options for having a family. These can include adoption and surrogacy.

But before making a decision, take the time to learn as much as you can about your options. Be sure to talk about them with your healthcare provider, partner, and those you are closest to.

5 Tips For Planning A Family

Tip 1: Work with Your Healthcare Provider to Create a Plan If you are thinking about starting a family, be sure to have a discussion with your healthcare provider so that you can work together to make a decision and to create a plan of action. If you're not ready yet, continue using an effective method of birth control.

If you have made the decision to become pregnant, it may be safest to do so when your condition is under control. Plan your pregnancy around a period when you are not having flares or major symptoms caused by your disease. The plan that's best for you depends on your chronic condition and the possible effects it may have on you and your baby.

It's important to work with your healthcare team to:

Discuss your health history, how to best control your condition, and your health goals to prepare your body. Learn if any of the medicines you currently take may harm your baby and may need to be stopped. Learn what vitamins and supplements you should take and which you should avoid. Decide if you need to see a high-risk obstetrician. If you do, your healthcare provider should be able to refer you to someone.

Tip 2: Manage Your Health A healthy pregnancy starts even before conception—with proper lifestyle habits. As you plan your pregnancy, look at it as an opportunity to take some time to jumpstart your goals for healthy living. Doing so can help you—and your baby. Here are some ideas to help you get started:

Don't smoke, drink alcohol, or use recreational drugs. Limit caffeine. Eat a well-balanced diet. Try to manage your stress. Women who have high levels of stress during pregnancy are at a higher risk for preterm birth.

Talk with your healthcare provider about these and any other ways you can manage your health.

Tip 3: Get Support Trying to have a baby and being pregnant can be very overwhelming. You may find it helpful to talk with someone who has already been in your shoes. If so, reach out to a support group to connect with others and to talk about what you're feeling and thinking.

Tip 4: Listen to Your Body Being pregnant causes a number of changes in your body. It may be harder for you to understand what's happening or to pick up on bodily cues that you used to rely on. If something doesn't feel right, talk with your healthcare provider about it right away.

Tip 5: Try to Enjoy Your Pregnancy Being pregnant and having a chronic condition may often require a significant amount of medical management. That may cause you to worry about your baby and make it harder to enjoy and appreciate being pregnant. While it may be difficult at times, take time to savor the experience as much as possible.

Tips For New Mothers

You may have concerns about how your medical condition may impact you and your child. Here are a few tips that may help:

Prioritize your life. Use your energy to do the things that matter most to you and your child. Do your best to stay positive. Your child will sense your outlook. The more positive you are, the more positive he or she may be. Be honest but reassuring about your medical condition. Sharing details about how you are managing it can be a good life lesson for your child.

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