The Baby-Making Preconception Prep Guide

Emily called MotherToBaby and confided, “My husband and I are thinking about getting pregnant…I am so excited but scared, too. I am wondering what I can do to make it more likely we will have a healthy pregnancy and baby.”

I assured Emily that we ***love*** it when people call ahead of their pregnancy and ask these questions. Preconception health is a topic that does not receive as much attention as it deserves, and it is important for both Emily and her husband. Good preconception health care can impact fertility and make it easier to conceive, and also helps to improve pregnancy outcomes and the health of the baby.

Here is a preconception prep guide– because if you are ready to have a baby, you want to take steps now to keep you and your baby as healthy as possible:

- **Make a pre-conception checkup appointment:** Begin by making an appointment about three months in advance with your obstetrical care provider. At that appointment you can confirm you are in good health. If you have any chronic conditions such as high blood pressure, thyroid disease, depression or diabetes you and your provider can make sure the condition is being managed effectively and confirm that any prescription or over-the-counter medications you are taking can be continued in the pregnancy. If you have a question about medications during pregnancy, MotherToBaby can help by providing you with information to bring to your appointment.

- **Begin taking a prenatal vitamin:** If you are not already taking a vitamin with folic acid this is a great time to start. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend that all women who can become pregnant take a vitamin containing 400 micrograms of folic acid; this helps reduce the chances for certain birth defects such as spina bifida (when the spinal cord does not form properly).

- **Review your vaccine status**: During your preconception checkup, make sure that you are up to date on vaccinations such as the MMR (measles, mumps, rubella), Tdap (tetanus, diphtheria, whooping cough), influenza, and COVID. Planning ahead makes it more likely you will not get ill during pregnancy and helps protect the baby from getting infections from parents after birth.

- **Get your body fit for pregnancy:** Get regular exercise and consider whether you and your partner are at your preferred weight. If not, make plans to remedy that prior to attempting to get pregnant. You can also learn more about a healthy diet and nutrition. This is something that may improve fertility in both parents and lay the groundwork for a healthy pregnancy.

- **Eliminate harmful exposures:** It goes without saying that this is a great time to make lifestyle changes such as reducing use of alcohol, tobacco, and recreational drugs. Addressing stress and mental health concerns up front can improve fertility, make the whole pregnancy experience better, and prepare you for the excitement and hard work of parenthood.

- **Evaluate your home and work environment:** If you and your partner are exposed to toxic substances like lead in your work or home environment, working to reduce those exposures is very effective when done ahead of the pregnancy.

MotherToBaby has many resources for Emily and her husband – and you! We have fact sheets on medications, herbal agents and supplements, diabetes and other health conditions, illnesses and vaccinations, occupations such as veterinarian and dental, exercise, paternal exposures, and cosmetics (sunscreen, skin creams, nail polish, hair dye). There are also useful blogs and podcasts, and whole web pages on various conditions, and if you have questions, our information specialists are here to help.

Questions? Call 866.626.6847 | Text 855.999.3525 | Email or Chat at MotherToBaby.org.

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By Beth Conover, APRN, CGC MotherToBaby Nebraska, UNMC

"There are so many risks to the baby if I go for dental work, right?" "What about x-rays?" "I don't like going to the dentist anyway, so I'll probably just wait until my baby is born. That should be fine, right?" Worries, excuses, we've heard it all at MotherToBaby when it comes to dental procedures during pregnancy. We often receive questions from women wondering whether dental care is safe. In short, the answer is….yes! What better time to talk about the reasons why it's ok than during June – typically the month the American Dental Association dubs as "Oral Health Month."

Routine dental care is low risk, and most emergency procedures can be done as well.
Good oral health improves your overall health, and increases your chances of a good pregnancy outcome. However, when you are scheduling a dental appointment and are pregnant (or trying to get pregnant), let the office know so that they can be prepared to make decisions about which procedures are safe for your baby. In some cases, you or your dentist may want to wait until after delivery for elective (non-necessary) procedures.

Here are some commonly asked questions we get from pregnant women:

- **When I brush my teeth, my gums have started to bleed. Is this normal? What should I do?**

Bleeding gums is a common problem during pregnancy. Pregnant women have hormonal changes that can increase

their chances of getting gum problems such as gingivitis (puffy and tender red gums that bleed easily). Your dentist will want to monitor this so that it does not progress to a more serious gum disease. Periodontal disease is a bacterial infection of the gums and jaw bones that support the teeth, and can increase your chances of having a smaller baby, delivering early, and having other pregnancy complications. Dentists recommend that you floss daily, and get your teeth cleaned on a regular basis during pregnancy (consider having it done more frequently, if you are having pregnancy gingivitis).

- **It seems like pregnancy is causing me to get more cavities in my teeth…am I right?**

Pregnancy can contribute to women having more cavities. This is in part due to changes in diet such as frequent snacks including sugary foods. To prevent cavities, eat a healthy diet and brush your teeth after eating sweets. In addition, if you have morning sickness, the acid from your stomach can affect your tooth enamel and make cavities more likely. Rinse your mouth with water or mouthwash after morning sickness episodes. If your toothpaste is making your morning sickness worse, ask your dentist for the name of a bland-tasting toothpaste.

- **What if I need to get a cavity filled or a tooth pulled? Can I have a local anesthetic?**

Agents like lidocaine which are injected into your gums are low risk for your baby. In one study, researchers compared pregnant women who received lidocaine injections as part of dental treatment with women who did not, and found no significant increase in risk for miscarriage, prematurity, or birth defects. If you need a pain medication, your dentist will take into account where you are in your pregnancy so as to make a choice that is safest for your baby.

- **Are dental x-rays safe in pregnancy?**

You may choose to have routine X-rays done prior to pregnancy, or to delay them until after you deliver – talk to your dentist about the best options for you. However, if you have a dental emergency and need to have them done, don't hesitate. Advances in technology have made dental X-rays safer, and they do not involve as much radiation or may not involve radiation at all. Your dental office will cover your neck and abdomen with a lead apron, which lessens the exposure to your baby even more.

- **What else can I do to ensure dental health?**

Schedule a visit to your dentist before you are pregnant. Get teeth cleaned, gums examined, and any dental issues addressed prior to pregnancy.

Brush your teeth at least twice a day and floss once a day. This helps reduce plaque, the sticky film that covers your teeth and can make gums inflamed and increase your risk for periodontal disease.

I hope I've given you a few good tips to chew on – Your teeth and baby will thank you. Have a healthy pregnancy!

Beth Conover, APRN, CGC, is a genetic counselor and pediatric nurse practitioner. She established the

Nebraska Teratogen Information Service in 1986, also known as MotherToBaby Nebraska. She was also a founding board member of the Organization of Teratology Information Specialists (OTIS). In her clinical practice, Beth sees patients in Pharmacogenetics Clinic and Genetics Clinic at the University of Nebraska Medical Center. Beth has provided consultation to the FDA and CDC.

About MotherToBaby

***MotherToBaby** is a service of the Organization of Teratology Information Specialists (OTIS), suggested resources by many agencies including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). If you have questions about exposures during pregnancy and breastfeeding, please call MotherToBaby toll-FREE at 866-626-6847 or try out MotherToBaby's **new text information service** by texting questions to (855) 999-3525. You can also visit **MotherToBaby.org** to browse a library of fact sheets about dozens of viruses, medications, vaccines, alcohol, diseases, or other exposures during pregnancy and breastfeeding or connect with all of our resources by downloading the new MotherToBaby free app, available on **Android** and **iOS** markets.*

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