

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT BEFORE GETTING PREGNANT

As a woman prepares to start a family, there are certain conditions and behaviors that she should examine. For example, the woman should know what types of prescription drugs she is taking and look at eliminating certain behaviors, such as smoking and consuming alcohol, to help ensure a healthy pregnancy. In addition, prior to conceiving, a woman should have a “Reproductive Life Plan” and know her family history. A woman’s emotional health and development are also essential when considering when to start or expand her family. Her partner should examine his habits as well, such as quitting smoking, so their home will be smoke-free before the baby is born.

REPRODUCTIVE LIFE PLAN

Creating a Reproductive Life Plan will help you think about how you would like to live your life and care for your health before you become pregnant. The plan can be started in the teen years and can be changed as a woman moves through the different stages of her life.

A Reproductive Life Plan is a set of goals you set for yourself in deciding if and when you wish to have children, and under what circumstances you would like to conceive. It also helps you set personal health goals so that you are physically and emotionally prepared, as well as healthy, for pregnancy.

Not every pregnancy is planned, so it is important that you develop healthy habits before you try to conceive. Your health and lifestyle decisions will affect the development of your baby.

When you are ready to have a partner in your life, it’s important that you discuss your plan with this person. You can then decide together what your plan will be going forward.

HIP would like to provide you with some tools to help you create your Reproductive Life Plan. Remember, this is something that you will want to review at least once a year to make sure you are still on track with your goals, and to change and create new goals as your views and life circumstances change.

Let’s begin!

ANSWER THE QUESTIONS BELOW TO HELP YOU PREPARE A PLAN.

1- Do you want to have children one day?

If YES:

- How many children would you like to have?
- How old would you like to be when you have your first child?
- How many years would you like there to be between your children?
- Once you are sexually active, do you have a plan to prevent pregnancy until you are ready?
- Is there someone you can speak with about birth control options? Your mother? Another family member? Your doctor? A teacher?
- If you get pregnant before you are ready, what will you do?

If NO:

- Once you are sexually active, do you have a plan to prevent pregnancy?
- If you get pregnant anyway, what will you do?

Goals: (example: I will talk to my doctor about birth control.)

1. _____
2. _____

PRE-CONCEPTION HEALTH

Even with the use of birth control, pregnancy sometimes happens. It's important that you lead a healthy lifestyle so that if pregnancy should occur, your baby will have a healthy start in life. Avoid risky behavior. If you answer YES to any of the questions below, please ask for help in quitting. It's important to remember that the steps you take today will benefit you and your baby tomorrow.

- Do you smoke?*
- If you are younger than 21 years of age, do you drink?
- If you are 21 years of age or older, do you binge drink?
- Do you use recreational drugs or abuse medications?
- Do you diet or overeat excessively?
- Do you have multiple sexual partners?

*Ready to quit tobacco? The QuitLine®, a service of the American Cancer Society, can help. Call **1-866-611-QUIT (1-866-611-7848)/TDD 1-866-228-4327**, 24 hours a day, every day of the year. Medicaid and Family Health Plus members should call the New York State Quitline at **1-866-NY-QUITS (1-866-697-8487)**.

Goals: (example: I will quit smoking.)

1. _____
2. _____

HEALTHY LIFESTYLE HABITS

Adopt the habits below to improve your health and the health of your unborn baby. Please note those that apply to you and set goals to incorporate others into your lifestyle.

- Get six to eight hours of sleep each night.
- Eat plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables and whole grains daily.
- Decrease the intake of fats and refined sugars in your diet.
- Take a daily multivitamin that contains folic acid. Folic acid helps to prevent certain birth defects when taken before and during pregnancy.
- Visit your doctor and dentist for regular check-ups.
- If you are sexually active, get tested for HIV/AIDS and other STI's (sexually transmitted infections).
- Make sure any health problems are under control. Work with your doctor to develop a plan of care to improve your health. Some medical conditions that can negatively affect pregnancy are: asthma, diabetes, high blood pressure, thyroid conditions, mental illness (including depression) heart defects and infections.

Goals: (example: I will call today to schedule a visit with my dentist.)

1. _____
2. _____

IMPORTANT VACCINATIONS

During your childhood, your doctor administered vaccines to help protect you from various diseases. These immunizations will continue to protect you and your baby through the first few months after your child is born. Make sure that your vaccines are up to date before you become pregnant. During your next visit with your doctor, ask him/her to review your immunization record and give you any vaccines that you might need. These vaccines include:

- Measles, Mumps, Rubella (MMR)
- Inactivated Polio Virus (IPV)
- Hepatitis B
- Varicella (Chicken Pox)
- Pertussis
- Gardisal (if you are under age 26)

Goals: (example: I will ask my doctor which vaccines I need.)

1. _____
2. _____

FAMILY HISTORY

Since health problems can sometimes run in families, you should identify problems that have happened to immediate family members (grandparents, parents, brothers and sisters) and discuss with your doctor ways you can reduce your risk of having these problems. When you know who the father of your baby will be, ask him to identify these problems in his family for a full understanding of the potential risks that may affect your pregnancy:

- A baby born prematurely or too early
- A baby who weighed less than 5 lb. 8 oz. at birth
- Pre-eclampsia (high blood pressure in pregnancy) or eclampsia (seizures)
- Gestational diabetes (diabetes that starts during pregnancy)
- Two or more miscarriages
- Infertility problems
- Stillborn baby (baby not alive at birth)
- Baby with a heart defect
- Depression before or after delivery
- Asthma
- Heart or lung disease
- Stroke
- Other

Goals: (example: I will speak with my doctor about the fact that my sister was born prematurely.)

1. _____
2. _____

EMOTIONAL AND PHYSICAL WELL-BEING

Your emotional health and development are essential when considering when to start or expand your family. Not only must your body be in its best health, but your mind must be as well. Consider the following questions when you are developing your Reproductive Life Plan and set goals to be sure you are where you want to be before you plan for your child.

- Do you often feel sad, anxious, overwhelmed or worried for longer than two weeks and what sort of things make you feel that way?
- What types of things make you angry and how do you calm yourself?
- What do you do if someone says something that you don't like?
- Is there anyone in your life who is physically abusing you?
- Is there anyone in your life who often says mean or hurtful things to you?
- Is there anyone in your life who is forcing you to take part in sexual activities that make you feel uncomfortable?

There is no issue too small for you to seek assistance. We can assist you in obtaining professional and confidential counseling. For immediate access to a mental health counselor, call the number on the back of your ID card.

Goals: (example: I feel sad almost every day. I will call for a referral to a mental health counselor.)

1. _____
2. _____

DREAMS AND GOALS

Your goals and dreams are very important to living a happy life and raising happy children. Think about your future goals. When do you see yourself starting a family? This is what your Reproductive Life Plan is all about— planning ahead to meet your goals in life and having a happy and healthy family!

- Where do you see yourself in five years?
- What will your life be like at that time?
- How much education do you want to complete?
- What type of work or career path do you want to pursue?
- Will you continue to work after you become a mother?
- If you want to be a stay-at-home mom, will you be able to afford to do it?
- It's important to have a financial plan before having children. You will need a safe place to live, money for living expenses (e.g., clothing, groceries), transportation and medical insurance.

Goals: (example: I want to finish college before I plan a family.)

1. _____
2. _____

There are many things to think about when planning your future, especially when a baby might be involved. It is important to be mindful that a pregnancy may occur, even if not planned, and you need to be sure that you are physically and emotionally prepared. Hopefully, the Reproductive Life Plan tool and the information about preconception health, have given you something to think about and to discuss with your family, spouse/life partner and doctors. Remember, this plan will change as you move through the different phases of your life, so you'll want to re-evaluate your plan at least yearly to be sure you're on target and to incorporate any changes.

The time to take care of your body is before you get pregnant, so that when you're ready, your body will be ready too.

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