

# Early prenatal care best for mother and baby

By Dr. Marina Hansen

Pregnancy is a very special time full of many exciting new experiences, but it is often accompanied by nerves and uncertainty. Having an established relationship with a provider when pregnancy questions arise can be reassuring for parents to be.

Prenatal care should be started in the first trimester of pregnancy. Early prenatal care has short-term and lifelong benefits for both mother and baby. Early care supports the best maternal health, allows time for adjusting current medications, if needed, and builds a trusting relationship with the obstetric provider.

Early prenatal care allows your provider to make the most accurate estimate of your due date. Dating is most accurate when an ultrasound is performed prior to 14 weeks gestation. Having correct dating is vital to monitoring appropriate fetal development, managing pregnancy and safe delivery.

Your first prenatal visit will include history, physical and lab work to screen for acute and chronic conditions. These check for conditions such as anemia, urinary tract infections, fetal anomalies and pregnancy-specific complications, such as preeclampsia and gestational diabetes. Additional monitoring and treatment may be necessary to ensure your baby is growing well and you stay healthy.

Expecting mothers who have nausea or vomiting early in pregnancy may find ginger tea or sugar-free ginger lozenges helpful. Frequent small, healthy snacks throughout the day will be important to keep the mother and growing baby nourished. Pregnant people should stay hydrated by drinking plenty of water, particularly during the summertime. If you are unable to keep down any food or liquids, contact your obstetric provider.

Urinary tract infections need to be treated in expecting mothers whether symptoms of infection are present or not. If multiple urinary tract infections occur during a pregnancy, your obstetric care provider may recommend daily antibiotics.

With preeclampsia, blood pressure may need to be monitored at home as well as in the office. Those identified as high risk for preeclampsia will be started on a baby aspirin for preeclampsia risk reduction.

With gestational diabetes risk, blood sugar will need to be checked both in the morning when fasting and with meals. A woman who has gestational diabetes will need monitoring after the baby is born to check for development of diabetes.

If you about to begin the pregnancy journey and aren't already taking a daily prenatal vitamin with extra folate, start taking one. Schedule an appointment with an obstetric provider. Stay active and eat healthy food. Do not drink alcohol, smoke cigarettes, use illicit substances, take over-the-counter pain relievers or drink excess caffeine. Take a deep breath and enjoy the journey of pregnancy.

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