

Have a Healthy Pregnancy: Be Aware and Take Action



Introduction

Pregnancy can be an exciting and happy time, but it can also be intense and stressful. Most people have a healthy pregnancy. Sometimes problems can occur, but you can take steps toward having the healthiest possible pregnancy.



Be aware
of how your body changes in pregnancy. Pay attention to anything that does not feel or seem right to you.



Take action
by talking to your health care provider about how you are feeling.



Be a champion
for yourself and your baby. You deserve to be heard.



1. You know your body best.

You are the expert when it comes to your body.

If you feel that something is not right, it is important to discuss it with your provider. Trusting your instincts can help make sure you have a healthy pregnancy.

Your provider can help get you any information you need and answer any questions or concerns you may have.

Be your own champion.

- ✓ Be aware of the changes in your body.
- ✓ Speak up if something does not feel right.
- ✓ Be ready with specific questions for your provider, such as:
 - I am concerned about how tired I am. Is this normal?
 - I just do not feel right. I have this pain going down my leg. What could this be?
 - I have been having some headaches this past week, and they will not go away. Do I need to come into the office?
 - I want to eat healthier. Can you help me plan my meals?

Let's see what happens when Maria **becomes her own champion.**

Maria: I have had a lot of leg pain this last week.

Provider: Well, you are pregnant. You are going to have a lot of aches and pains.

Maria: But I am worried. **Could it be a blood clot?** I have heard that sometimes leg pain can be a blood clot during pregnancy. **What can we do to check this out?**

Provider: OK. I hear you. Let's talk about what could be causing your leg pain and what we can do to make sure this is not a blood clot.

Maria: That sounds good. Thank you.



Maria spoke up for herself. She asked two specific follow-up **questions** that her provider heard and thought about.

You deserve to feel safe and respected by your provider throughout your pregnancy. Speak up if you feel like:

- You are disrespected by your provider or their staff.
- You are not being heard.
- Your concerns are not taken seriously or are easily dismissed.
- Your provider is not acting professionally toward you during every visit.





2. Be aware of warning signs.

Throughout your pregnancy and after you give birth, it is important to let your provider know about changes in your body that do not feel right to you. The following **warning signs** are symptoms that may occur during or after pregnancy and may mean more serious, life-threatening problems for you and your baby:

- Vaginal bleeding or discharge with a bad smell during pregnancy
- Signs of preeclampsia, a potentially fatal condition of pregnancy that involves high blood pressure developed during or after pregnancy:
 - Severe headache
 - Abdominal pain
 - New or worsening of existing swelling anywhere during your third trimester (this usually happens in the hands and feet)
- Baby moving much less than before during pregnancy
- Heavy vaginal bleeding after pregnancy (soaks through one or more pads per hour)
- Chest or heart discomfort, at any stage
- Fever of 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit (or 38 degrees Celsius) or higher, at any stage
- Severe nausea or vomiting, at any stage
- Any other sign that you feel is serious, at any stage

If you experience any of these signs, contact your provider right away. If you cannot reach your provider, go to the emergency room or call **911**. For more information about warning signs, talk with your provider and ask for a “Know the Warning Signs” palm card.

Let’s see how Crystal **trusts her instincts** and contacts her provider’s office.

Crystal: I have a headache. Things look funny, and my stomach hurts.

Provider’s receptionist: OK, let’s make an appointment for next week?

Crystal: No. This does not feel right. I need to see the doctor now. Can you fit me in, or should I go to labor and delivery at the hospital?

Provider’s receptionist: OK, I hear you. This does not seem normal to you. I will talk to the doctor as soon as they are free and get back to you soon.





3. Get the information you need to control chronic conditions such as high blood pressure and diabetes.

Many people live with chronic conditions, such as obesity, high blood pressure and diabetes. Any one of these conditions can increase your risk of having a serious health problem in pregnancy such as blood clots, preeclampsia and stroke. You can take action to control chronic conditions by making sure you have all the information you need. Talk to your provider about your possible health risks during pregnancy.

Questions to ask your provider:

I remember my blood pressure was higher than normal before I got pregnant. Do I have to worry about that now?

I am concerned that you said my blood pressure is higher than it should be. What can I do to lower it?

Can you give me a printed list of tips for lowering my blood pressure that I can take home?

How can I keep track of my blood pressure? Should I come into the office to have my blood pressure checked?

How will you track my blood pressure to make sure I am not developing any problems?

My grandmother and my mother have diabetes. How is my blood sugar level?

Should I worry about problems with blood sugar or diabetes during this pregnancy?

What can I do to keep my blood sugar at a healthy level?



4. Get support from your provider if you want to quit smoking or e-cigarette use (vaping).

Tobacco or vaping can cause serious problems during pregnancy and can affect your baby.

Remember, vaping is not a safe alternative to smoking. Nicotine is dangerous for you and your baby during pregnancy. Other chemicals released by e-cigarettes may also be harmful. Talk to your provider, community health worker or doula about getting help to quit or cut down.

Questions to ask your provider, community health worker or doula:

I want to stop smoking now that I am pregnant, but I need help. Where can I get that help?

I am worried that vaping is bad for my baby, but it calms me down. What else can I do to lower my anxiety?

Can you give me a referral to see someone about this?



5. Get information about ways to move your body and eat healthier foods.

You can continue to stay active during your pregnancy. Talk to your provider about how to exercise in a safe way and what foods you should eat during pregnancy.

Questions to ask your provider:

What kind of exercise would be good for me throughout the different stages of my pregnancy?

What would be a healthy weight gain for me during this pregnancy?

What types of vitamins should I take?

What else can I do to have a healthy pregnancy?

What foods should I avoid while I am pregnant?

Are there any medications I should not take?



6. Get vaccinated.

Some infectious illnesses can put you and your baby at higher risk of having a poor health outcome. Protect yourself by getting vaccinated against common illnesses such as influenza (flu).

Questions to ask your provider:

What vaccinations do I need to protect myself and my baby?

Can you tell me more about the Tdap vaccine? I heard it is important.

Is it safe for me and my baby to get the COVID-19 vaccine?



7. Make the most of your visits.

Here are some suggestions to help you work with your provider, so you can get the most out of your visits with them.

- Write down questions and bring them to your visit.
- Ask a trusted partner, family member or friend to go to your visit with you, so they can help you take notes during the session and learn about what they can do to support you during your pregnancy.
- Try to imagine (visualize) what your provider is explaining to you. Consider what your provider recommends and express your doubts or disagreements, if you have any.
- Ask your provider to explain the information in words that are familiar to you. For example, "I do not understand what that means. Would you please explain it differently to me?"
- Ask your provider how you can get more information and learn more. For example, "Where can I get more information on available programs and services for support during pregnancy?"

- Finally, check to make sure you understand the information your provider shared. Try repeating the information back to your provider to make sure it is correct. For example, “So, what I heard is that you want me to walk 20 minutes each day because this will help with my circulation. But if I have more leg pain I should come and see you right away. Is that correct?”

There are many resources available to people who are pregnant across New York City. Ask your provider for the “New York City Resource Guide to Health Before, During and After Pregnancy,” or visit nyc.gov/health/pregnancy.

