



WOMEN'S  
HEALTH  
INITIATIVE

## FACT SHEET — *Pregnancy*

### Thinking About Becoming Pregnant?

Proper care of the body during pregnancy is crucial, but there are limits to what you can do once the baby is on the way. If you are planning on becoming pregnant, the best thing you can do is prepare your body before you conceive.

### How Should A Woman Prepare for Pregnancy?

- ◆ Women need to schedule a preconception visit with their osteopathic physician. The D.O. can uncover any potential health problems at this visit. Topics such as family history of genetic diseases and multiple births, menstrual period patterns, overall health, medications, birth control and prior pregnancies should be discussed. A pelvic exam, Pap smear and blood and urine test should be performed to help identify any problems.
- ◆ Women should reach an ideal weight prior to becoming pregnant. Pre-pregnancy weight and weight gain during pregnancy have an important impact on the baby's health. According to the Physician's Desk Reference, Family Guide to Women's Health, weight loss is not advisable during pregnancy for any woman, so women should act before conceiving.
- ◆ Develop an exercise program that can be maintained throughout the pregnancy. Brisk walking, swimming and stationary cycling are recommended as the safest exercises for pregnant women. Studies show that women who are physically fit tolerate pregnancy and delivery better than women who are not.
- ◆ If a woman smokes, she should stop prior to trying to conceive. Studies have shown that smoking may have an effect on fertility. Smoking also increases a woman's chance of miscarriage during the first trimester.
- ◆ Avoid alcoholic beverages. Some studies suggest that women who drink prior to pregnancy tend to have smaller babies.
- ◆ Increase folic acid in your diet. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend anyone trying to conceive take 0.4-milligrams of folic acid through diet, such as in spinach, or supplements daily at least one month prior to trying to conceive. This will help prevent neural tube defects, such as spina bifida.

### Are You Pregnant?

It is important for a woman to see her doctor as soon as she suspects she might be pregnant. Missing a period, being over a week late, nausea, vomiting or fatigue are all possible symptoms. A positive response on a home pregnancy test is also another indicator. If a woman experiences any of these signs then she should schedule an appointment with her doctor as soon as possible because good prenatal care is important for a healthy pregnancy.

### Nutrition During Pregnancy

- ◆ A woman at or near her ideal weight should gain two to four pounds in the first trimester and three-quarters to one pound per week thereafter. Women who are underweight or overweight should discuss proper weight gain with their doctor.



AMERICAN OSTEOPATHIC  
ASSOCIATION

142 East Ontario

Chicago, IL 60611

TEL 312-202-8000

<http://www.aoa-net.org>

◆ Experts agree pregnant woman should consume 2,500 calories per day. Pregnant women need about 27 percent more protein than what is recommended for non-pregnant women - a total of 60 grams per day. Meat, fish, poultry, eggs, milk and other dairy products are excellent sources of protein.

◆ Pregnant women should drink at least eight, 8-ounce glasses of water or other fluids per day. Beverages that contain caffeine or artificial sweeteners should be avoided.

◆ Some women may need to take prenatal vitamins. Women should discuss with their doctors whether prenatal vitamins are needed.

### **What is safe during pregnancy?**

◆ Women with uncomplicated pregnancies can stay at work right up until labor and usually resume working several weeks after giving birth. However, any job that requires severe physical strain should be avoided. It is important that women rest during the day if they find themselves becoming tired.

◆ Some experts say travel is acceptable except within a month or so of the expected due date. The risk is not from the journey itself, but in the chance that a complication may develop or labor may begin while far from medical services. Women should discuss with their doctor any travel plans that may arise.

◆ Sexual intercourse is safe unless a woman is at risk for a miscarriage or early labor. Studies show that one in four women are less interested in sex during the first and last trimester.

◆ Raw meat and cat litter can both contain an organism called toxoplasma that can cause infection to the mother and baby. Pregnant women should avoid eating meat that is not well cooked and handling raw meat and cat litter.

◆ To avoid possible injury to the fetus, doctors recommend that it is best for pregnant women to avoid contact with hazardous materials such as lead, harsh cleaning solutions, paint fumes, paint removers, fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides. If a woman must handle these items, then she should wear gloves and be in a well-ventilated area to minimize contact.

◆ Many over-the-counter (OTC) medications can affect a developing fetus. Typically, a woman will

receive a list of safe OTC medications at her first obstetrical appointment.

### **Tips for a Healthy Pregnancy**

◆ See your doctor at the first suspicion of pregnancy.

◆ Follow your doctor's dietary recommendations scrupulously. It is important to consume the proper amount of vitamins and nutrients daily.

◆ Do not smoke during pregnancy. Smoking causes an immediate constriction of the arteries, depriving the baby of not only the proper amount of oxygen, but of essential nutrients as well. This can lead to defects of the brain, heart and other vital organs and systems.

◆ According to a study in the Journal of the American Osteopathic Association, women should not drink alcohol during pregnancy. Even small amounts have been found to cause low birth-weight and fetal abnormalities.

◆ Take no OTC medications without discussing them with your doctor first.

◆ Exercise daily and rest when needed. Women should always discuss exercise programs with their doctor before starting.

◆ Get at least eight to nine hours of sleep each night. Women should sleep on their side instead of their back, because the weight of the uterus can constrict some of the major blood vessels when lying on the back.

◆ Women are many times the best judge of how the pregnancy is going. Contact your doctor if you have questions or concerns.

### **What are Some Common Problems of Pregnancy and How Can They Be Treated?**

◆ Nausea and vomiting are a common problem in early pregnancy. To reduce the nausea, eat several small meals throughout the day and drink plenty of liquids. Even though it is most known as "morning sickness", many women experience nausea and vomiting throughout the day and throughout their whole pregnancy.

◆ Constipation is also common during pregnancy. Getting enough fiber from bran, fruits and raw

vegetables is very important. Proper diet, drinking plenty of liquids and daily exercise should prevent or help constipation problems.

◆ Heartburn is the third most common pregnancy problem. This is due to the expanding uterus pushing on the stomach, forcing acid up into the esophagus. Eating small meals throughout the day and avoiding bending over or lying flat can help with this problem. Also, antacids may help relieve discomfort.

◆ Many pregnant women complain of fatigue and headaches early in pregnancy. Usually these go away by the fourth or fifth month. Women who still are experiencing problems after the fifth month should contact their doctor.

◆ Many women develop thicker, more odorous vaginal discharge during pregnancy for no apparent reason. Yeast infections are common during pregnancy and women who suspect one should contact their doctor.

◆ Frequent urination is a problem for many women, especially later in the pregnancy. This is caused by the uterus pressing on the bladder. Some women may leak urine when they move or cough. Ask your doctor about exercises that help bladder control.

◆ Urinary tract infections are very common in pregnant women. If left untreated they can trigger premature labor. Women should contact their doctor immediately if they experience burning during urination.

◆ Backache develops in many women late in pregnancy. A maternity girdle, rest, supportive shoes and massages may help alleviate this problem. Also, exercises that strengthen the back muscles can make women less vulnerable to back problems.

◆ Varicose veins can often develop in the legs, external genitals or abdominal wall. Wearing support stockings and raising the legs whenever possible can help prevent and alleviate varicose veins.

◆ Swelling and fluid retention is a common problem late in pregnancy and is rarely serious. However, if women see swelling in their hands and face it may be a sign of preeclampsia, pregnancy-induced high blood pressure, and should be reported to the doctor immediately.

The American Osteopathic Association (AOA) urges women to contact their osteopathic family physician for advice on preserving good health for an active

lifestyle. Osteopathic physicians (D.O.s), physicians treating people, not just symptoms, are especially well qualified to assist in preventive healthcare since they are fully trained licensed physicians who have additional training that focuses on the body's structure and function, and its ability to heal itself. For more information visit the AOA's Web site at [www.aoa-net.org](http://www.aoa-net.org).