



A Short Guide to Managing Pregnancy



From the Indusladies Community
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Introduction

So, you want to have a baby... congratulations! This is a life-changing decision that will bring challenges and responsibilities, but also much joy and fulfillment.

This guide will help you prepare for your pregnancy and the birth of your baby. It will contain common-sense advice, factual information, and links to resources for more in-depth research you can do on your own.

You have to prepare yourself mentally, physically, and emotionally for the changes that are going to happen over the next year. To do this, arm yourself with as much information from reputable sources as you can find.



Best wishes to you as you embark on this journey of new motherhood!



You will face challenges without the immediate availability of the support system you would have relied on back home. This is not an impossible or even daunting task, as long as you trust yourself, and do your homework.

This guide is only a primer; it is not meant to replace the advice of medical professionals. Establish a good support system (trusted relatives, health personnel, husband, and community organizations) that can be used in conjunction with this guide for a happy and healthy pregnancy.

If you are knowledgeable, you will be confident, and a confident mother-to-be will be a good mother.

Best wishes to you as you embark on this journey of new motherhood!



Pre-pregnancy

• Care Provider •

It is a good idea, finances permitting, to scout around for a suitable health professional BEFORE you start trying to conceive (TTC). Do some research to discern what kind of care would suit you. Here are some of your choices:

It would be a good idea to make an initial visit to your family doctor to open up a discussion.



1) General Practitioner (GP)

This is your regular family doctor. He or she would be able to advise you on routine matters related to TTC, and how to proceed thereafter. If you already have someone you are comfortable with, it would be a good idea to make an initial visit to open up a discussion, especially if you are going to be an older mother, or have special health needs (like diabetes).

2) Certified Nurse-Midwife

These are professionally qualified pregnancy and childbirth specialists who may or may not be affiliated with a hospital. Midwives often work in teams, just like physicians, and offer personalized care that may continue after your child's birth. This is a good choice for women with low-risk pregnancies.

3) Obstetrician-Gynecologist (OB-GYN)

OB-GYNs are physicians who have specialized training in the care of pregnant women. They are a popular choice for many women, but are especially necessary when a woman has challenges during the TTC phase, and/or during pregnancy.



There are other health care professionals, such as midwives and doulas, who offer pregnancy-related services. Do careful research before committing to any pregnancy health professional, as not all of them are subject to the same licensing and training regulations.

Check reviews online or get personal recommendations from friends and neighbors. If you feel like you and your health professional are not working well together, don't hesitate to get a second opinion or make a change. Alternatively, make your feelings known, so the doctor/nurse-midwife can serve you better. You are within your rights to assert yourself in this way, as long as your needs and preferences are reasonable. Do not be afraid to speak up, but remember to be polite and accommodating yourself, too.

During your first visit, your care provider should do a full medical history. If you have a history of medical problems, it may help to bring copies of relevant test results/treatment histories from the past, or your home country. She may also update your vaccinations (tetanus, MMR), and advise you on supplements (prenatal vitamins are ideally started when you are TTC).

This is a good chance to get a feel for the health professional you have chosen, and the facilities available to you for childbirth, and postpartum care. This is also a good time to clarify the terms of your health insurance. Be very sure of what kind of expenses you may incur out of pocket, so you can budget accordingly. This can vary greatly from provider to provider, and it is easier to figure it all out beforehand, so there are no surprises later.

● Lifestyle ●

It is extremely important to ensure that you and your partner have an equal footing in your marriage by the time you get to the TTC phase. Establish good communication habits between the two of you such that you are able to discuss any worries politely and objectively.

It goes without saying that the TTC phase is an important one for the health of you and your baby. This means you must pay careful attention to exercise and nutrition, as advised by your doctor. If you have not been particularly concerned about your health before, now is a good time to educate yourself, and change any bad habits.



Try to follow a sensible diet, based on nutritional science (eat balanced meals, avoid too much junk food, and so on), and follow the advice of dieticians or physicians.

In addition to keeping physically fit, it is important to remain, or become, emotionally and psychologically stable and strong. Try to avoid troublesome people or stressful situations. Learn relaxation techniques designed for pregnant women based on yoga or meditation.



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Surround yourself with a support system made up of loving, well-intentioned, well-informed people who genuinely care for you. At this time in your life, you are allowed to be selfish, because you must put your baby's health, and by proxy your own, above all other concerns. Make sure your husband is capable of helping you out around the house, or make plans to hire extra help. Have a tentative plan in place for extra help immediately after the baby is born.

While TTC, it is important to remain calm. Giving in to anxiety will not do your cause any good. Avoid listening to the advice of too many people. One or two trusted friends or relatives, and your physician, are more than enough sources for information. Avoid compulsively researching every symptom or twinge you feel – the Internet is full of misinformation. It is important to practice being confident and assertive now, because these are qualities you must possess as a parent.

To increase chances of conception, you do not need to drastically change your lifestyle, unless it is very unhealthy. Common-sense precautions apply – don't drink too much alcohol, definitely don't smoke, get enough sleep, eat healthily and exercise moderately, and reduce stress. If you need to lose some weight, now is the time to do it, but make sure you do it properly (follow a nutritious, reduced-calorie eating plan and exercise more).



• Conception •

Once you actively start TTC, don't worry if you do not conceive within the first few months. Doctors usually recommend that couples TTC for a whole year before concluding that there is a problem, and that further investigation and intervention is necessary. Just follow your doctor's advice in this regard, and avoid jumping to conclusions and panicking prematurely.

Home pregnancy tests are easy to use and come with complete instructions. Early symptoms of pregnancy vary from woman to woman, but may include breast tenderness, extreme tiredness, nausea, and frequent urination. Once you have established you are pregnant using a home pregnancy test, you need to schedule a visit with your health professional. Many doctors won't see you until at least 8 weeks after your last menstrual period (LMP).



In a normal, low-risk pregnancy, this is not a cause for concern. Just continue with good eating habits, gentle exercise, prenatal vitamins, and stress control/reduction techniques until you are able to see your doctor. However, if you experience severe abdominal pain or bleeding during this wait time, you should call your doctor right away.

At your first prenatal visit after conception, expect to have a comprehensive medical history taken, if not previously done. It is advisable to have your husband attend as many of these visits as he can. On this visit, the doctor may have questions for him regarding his health history, which may have a bearing on your pregnancy and unborn child. The doctor will also advise you of any further tests that may be necessary.



At this, and all subsequent visits, bring a list of questions you may have for your doctor. Make sure you understand everything that is said to you. Do not be afraid to ask for clarification, so you can explore all your options, and make informed decisions. Your health professional is your BEST source of information, and should have the final word on any number of issues (even though friends and relatives may be weighing in with their input).

Also, write down any relevant information the doctor gives you. This will help you to keep track of what to ask, what the answers were, and allow you to reflect on the visit later, when you are better able to concentrate. If necessary, delegate this note-taking task to your husband.

Pregnancy

There is more than enough information on the Internet about each trimester of pregnancy. Many of the guides go week-by-week. Whatever your sources of information, make sure you do not get overwhelmed by too many differing accounts. Each pregnancy is different, even for the same woman, so imagine how different each woman's pregnancy can be. Let your doctor have the final word if you have questions or concerns.

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• Exercise •

Make sure you start a light, doctor-recommended exercise program if you have not already done so. If you have been exercising regularly, maintain your program, but make sure you check with your doctor before starting anything new, or continuing what you have always done.

Some beneficial exercises for pregnant women are walking, swimming, and yoga. However, it is important to educate yourself about what forms or intensity of these exercises are safe in pregnancy. Some yoga poses, for example, are not advised for pregnant women.

It is very important to keep active. Pregnancy is not a disease. Unless you are advised to be on bed rest, or cut down on exertion, there is nothing stopping you from maintaining a regular, normal domestic and work routine. Housework, driving, sitting at a desk, and other routine tasks and chores can go on as usual.

In fact, the more active you are, the likelier it will be that you will be strong and healthy by the end of your pregnancy, which is important for labor and delivery. If you live in an area with a harsh winter climate, make a special effort to keep active, and get some fresh air once in a while. Even walking at your local mall will be beneficial to you. Resist the urge to stay cooped up indoors.

Typically, pregnancy is not a time to be concerned about weight loss or gain. Your main goal should be to stay or be healthy, which means exercise and nutrition should focus on optimal health benefits, as opposed to obsessing over numbers on the scale. Your doctor will guide you if you develop gestational diabetes or other conditions where weight becomes an issue.

Otherwise, enjoy your changing body and don't be too hard on yourself, especially if you have had body image problems before. To bring a new life into this world is a worthy, challenging task, and you should appreciate that your body will necessarily change in order to accomplish this.



• Nutrition •

Eating balanced meals is never more important than during pregnancy. It is vital to eat a variety of healthy foods every day to ensure that your little bean is getting the required nutrients.

You would repeatedly hear that you are eating for two. That, however, does not mean that you directly double the portion sizes.

On the other hand, if you are on a diet, particularly one that involves ignoring complete food groups, you need to stop that while you are pregnant/ nursing. The food you eat is the main source of nutrition for the baby inside, since the baby cannot tap into your reserves.

The tiny baby growing inside you needs nutrient rich foods rather than just extra calories. So you need to ensure that your daily diet comprises of a variety of healthy foods. Eating sensibly now will also help you lose the pregnancy weight sooner.

After a particular stage in your pregnancy, your baby will be able to taste the amniotic fluid it is floating in. This fluid will have the flavor of the food you eat. You just might be instilling good eating habits in your child by eating healthy during pregnancy!

In addition to healthy meals pregnancy multi-vitamins ensure that your baby is getting everything it needs.



You must consume the following types of food every day during your pregnancy:

Carbohydrates – like rice, wheat, bread, pasta, cereal should typically form the basis of your meal. Complex-carbohydrates (like brown rice/ whole wheat bread) contain more nutrients and fiber than refined ones (like white rice/ white bread)

Protein – It is crucial for the rapidly growing fetus. Lean meats, dry-fruits and lentils, beans and dairy products are excellent sources.

Fresh fruit and vegetables – a simple guideline is to eat a variety of different colors of everyday to get a variety of vitamins and minerals. Steaming vegetables preserves the vitamins and minerals much better than boiling them. Ensure though that the fruits and vegetables are thoroughly washed.

Dairy Products – The contain calcium which is vital for the development of the baby's bones. You need to ensure that dairy products are pasteurized.

Essential Fats – While you do not want to over indulge on fats, your growing baby does need some amount of fat and oils to be present in your diet. Choose cooking oils which are high in unsaturated fats. Avoid hydrogenated fats. Omega-3 fatty acids, especially, are crucial for brain and eye development in the fetus. In the last trimester Omega-3 supplements are recommended.



Iron – It is important during pregnancy for the baby’s blood supply to develop. It is advisable to get iron from your diet. Vitamin C enables iron to be absorbed quickly in your body. E.g. Squeeze lemon juice on your spinach, or eat some dried fruits with a glass of orange juice.

Folic acid – It is essential for the development of the baby’s neural tube. Natural sources include liver, broccoli, Brussels sprouts. Since folic acid cannot be stored by your body, it needs to be in your diet every day.

Water/ fluids – With all those changes going on in your body, you need your 1.8 liters of water every day. It helps with the growth of your baby, helps in case you have constipation, reduces UTIs occurring and reduces swelling.

Your body has a wonderful way of letting you know what it needs. Learn to interpret your cravings correctly. For instance, if you are craving sweets, instead of picking up sweets, go for a piece of fruit.

Many women have cravings for salt during pregnancy. Try eating more sodium rich foods. However, too much salt could cause water retention and also high blood pressure which could cause undesirable effects during the later stages of pregnancy.

Regarding synthetic foods like margarine and artificial sweeteners, they have not been around for long enough for research to conclusively state that they are good in the long term for the fetus. The rule of the thumb is to stick to age-old traditional products.

While you may indulge as an occasional treat, avoid junk food since it is very low in nutrient content but high in calories – which implies that the weight will be more difficult to shift after the baby is born.

A variety of home remedies are usually suggested by our near and dear ones. They mean well; it has probably worked for them. However, it is best to do your own research about such remedies and draw your own conclusions.



If these remedies call for ingredients you know the provenance of, it is probably fine – for e.g. ginger from a store or tulsi leaves from your back yard. However, if these call for pre-processed ingredients bought from a store, you should be wary of adulteration and of it containing substances which may not be permitted in the country you live in.

This applies to certain medicinal potions which are given to your new born traditionally too. Your healthcare provider would not approve of finding strange substances in your/ your baby's body.

During pregnancy and after, make double/ triple portions when you cook and freeze the food in individual freezer containers for each portion. Even rice and roti freeze well. It will give you a home-made nutritious meal to pull out on days you are tired/ not in the mood to cook.

• Sleep •

It is logical that during pregnancy, you may become tired easier, and need more sleep or naps. Please listen to your body, and change your regular routine as required. Don't push yourself if your body is telling you to take a rest. Also, your sleep patterns and problems will vary from trimester to trimester, so don't worry if things are not going well – it'll all change soon enough.



If you are finding it hard to sleep at night, try to make up for it with regular naps during the day.



Ironically, it may become harder to fall or stay asleep when you are pregnant and more tired, due to your changing body, more frequent trips to the bathroom, and insomnia. Some women find that oversized maternity pillows, which support the belly and relieve pressure on the legs, to be helpful in getting comfortable.

If you are finding it hard to sleep at night, try to make up for it with regular naps during the day. If you are really struggling to sleep (due to swollen or painful legs, insomnia, skin itchi-ness, heartburn, leg cramps, and so on), consult your doctor, who may be able to offer relief for your specific problems, and so allow an improvement in your sleeping habits.

• Morning Sickness •

The occurrence of morning sickness varies in its intensity from woman to woman. Some women experience little or no ill feelings or nausea. Others may not be able to keep any food down. However it manifests, it is important to keep up with your nourishment even if you don't feel like eating. In fact, an empty stomach aggravates nausea.

If possible, try to have a light, starchy snack (crackers are ideal) even before you get out of bed in the morning, which is when some women feel most ill (hence the name). Ginger ale can be very soothing for feelings of nausea and to settle an upset stomach.

Try to eat and drink something (whatever appeals to you) if you are finding it hard to work up an appetite or keep food down. Apart from obviously harmful substances like alcohol, there really are no very strict food restrictions during pregnancy. It is usually a time of changing tastes, so again, listen to your body, and within normal, healthy limits, try to get your dietary needs met by whatever you are able to eat even if you are nauseous.

If your morning sickness is so serious that it is causing you to lose weight and feel listless and without enough energy to carry you through your day, you need to consult your doctor. In extreme cases of morning sickness, medical intervention may be necessary.



• The Role of the Expectant Father •

Don't forget Dad in all of this – he has a huge role to play even before baby arrives. It is important that you include your husband in as much of the planning, as well as the physical and emotional journey, as possible. He needs to be made to feel a part of the experience, because it is easy for him to get sidelined while you get all the attention. If you make a conscious effort to include him in decision-making, and share your feelings with him at every step, it is more likely he will be a cooperative, appreciative partner to you.

Conversely, if your husband has been used to a life of luxurious pampering from you, now is the time for him to step up and pamper you. This will be good training for when he has to help out with the baby. You are going to need his physical and emotional support every step of the way, so if this is not normally your dynamic, now is the time to take on the new roles.

Educate him on the ways and workings of the house. At minimum, he should be able to cook a few simple, nutritious meals (for you and him), do some basic cleaning and grocery shopping, and take care of little domestic matters that might need attention (changing the furnace filter, paying bills, dealing with visitors, and so on).

A good way for you both to come to terms with the significant new addition to your household is to work on little baby-related projects together. Decorate the baby's room, put the crib together, buy and install the car seat... all these little tasks will bring you closer if you do them together, and give you a chance to celebrate the magnitude of the wonderful new change you are about to experience as a new family unit. Give yourselves time and space, in private, to bond as a couple and come to a new understanding of your changing roles and relationship.



• Purchase of Baby Equipment and Supplies •

Some families, for cultural reasons, avoid purchasing baby items before the baby is born. If you can avoid this prohibition, it is strongly advised that you do as much of your essential baby shopping as you can BEFORE your baby is born.

Do not be intimidated or carried away with the endless lists of baby must-haves you will find online. The best way to decide what you really need is to ask family and friends what they found most useful, and also what they bought that they never ended up using. For example, most people agree that a wipes warmer seems like a good idea, but actually gets very little to no use in reality.

The costs can rise rapidly if you go on a shopping spree driven by anxiety or indecision. Basically, your baby will need somewhere to sleep (depending on need and preference of parents – a bassinet, a crib, or the family bed), something to eat (breastfeeding equipment like pumps and bottles, or formula and related paraphernalia), and clothes to wear (be careful of buying too many “cute outfits” beforehand that either won’t fit baby, or will prove to be impractical). You will also need diapers.



Beyond that, it may be prudent to wait for baby to be born before you decide what other equipment is needed. Don’t forget that you will get many gifts from people. It is a good idea to start a baby registry, and direct people to that, so you can control what you are receiving. Don’t be shy to ask for practical items like diapers, which will eventually turn out to be far more useful than toys or fancy specialty items (your baby really does not need a tiny tiara).



Labor and Delivery

This is usually what expectant mothers are most anxious about – the actual process of giving birth to their babies. The pain that is associated with childbirth seems to be the major pre-occupation of a lot of first-time mothers. However, like everything else about pregnancy, it is almost impossible to predict what any woman’s experience of labor and delivery will be like.

What is important is to have, by this time, established a confident and trusting relationship with your health professional. You need to be comfortable with him or her, used to asking questions and having them answered in a way that is satisfactory to you, and familiar with the hospital or whatever birthing quarters you have chosen.

Have some discussions beforehand with your husband, and perhaps a few significant others, about possibilities like C-sections, epidurals, and so on. If you know what your options are, and what may occur, it is easier to make decisions at the time, since you would have done some thinking beforehand. However, remember to give yourself some flexibility.

In other words, don’t get too attached to recommendations from others (except, perhaps, your doctor), or things you think you “must” and “should” do. It is advisable to see how labor progresses, and try to adapt to changing circumstances as much as possible.

Do not be afraid to ask for what you need or want at the time of labor and delivery – your health professionals, spouse, and other supporters are there for you, so don’t feel guilty about making use of this support. This is one of the few times in your life when it is truly all about you – the most important job you have at this point is making sure you and your baby make it through the birthing process as healthily and happily as possible.

Everyone else’s comfort and convenience takes second priority., Let your husband step up and cater to your needs. After all, it’s a vital skill any father worth his salt needs, anyway.



After baby is born, the whole family may be required to spend a few days in the hospital. Try to rest immediately after the birth of your baby, but remember to make as much use of this time as you can to learn from the nurses about care of the newborn (feeding, bathing, diapering, swaddling, and sleep habits). The more knowledgeable and self-sufficient you become in this regard, the better for you.

There is no mystical or spiritual dimension, or closely-guarded secrets, when it comes to caring for your new baby. Empower yourself with knowledge and skills, and start doing as much as you can, as soon as you can, for your new baby yourself.

Make sure your husband is able to contribute, too. Men are perfectly capable of holding, feeding, and diapering babies, and putting them to sleep. When you both leave the hospital for home, you have all you need to take care of your baby yourself. Never doubt your own abilities, and if you do, fix your crisis of confidence by reading, researching, and learning.



Post-delivery care

Allow people to help in the first few weeks if help is offered. The best things they can do for you is fix meals, do chores around the house, run errands for you (shopping, laundry, paying bills, and so on), and generally taking care of the things you are temporarily unable to do due to limited time and energy. It is important that you are able to delegate at least some of these tasks to others so you can spend sufficient time and energy caring for your newborn.

Breastfeeding can be one of the most challenging skills for a new mother (and a new baby) to master. If you are finding it difficult, reach out to someone who can help. There are organizations like La Leche League in various countries including the US and UK who specialize in this kind of work. Your hospital may offer lactation consultants, or you can contact one privately. Your doctor or pediatrician might be able to point you to other resources.

Wherever you look for help, make sure it is an expert source. There is more than just a mechanical component to breastfeeding; there are psychological, emotional and physical dimensions that cannot be ignored, which may happen if you seek help in the wrong places. Specifically, try not to listen exclusively to highly personal accounts from individuals, based only on their experiences. Be able to tell an old wives' tale from a genuinely helpful bit of advice.

• Care for the new mother •

Remember to take care of yourself while you're pouring all this intensive and necessary care and attention into your baby. Don't neglect your own sleep needs, your own nutrition, and your own psychological well-being. This is where your spouse will really have to step up, because even though this is all new for him, he has a slight advantage over you in that he has not undergone the same physical strain you have (9 months of pregnancy and labor and delivery are not to be scoffed at).

Get some form of exercise - you don't have to go to gym or train for a marathon, but unless a doctor has advised complete bed rest, it is good to be up and about, perhaps doing very



light house work or going for walks with your baby. Follow your doctor's instructions, but remember that women are not usually considered to be invalids after giving birth.

In case you have had a Cesarean, you are not allowed to drive for a period of time (six weeks in some countries) since your insurance will be invalid. You would have also been sent home with very effective pain relief medication which could mask the strain of over-exertion. So, in that case, remember to take it easy, even though your body doesn't seem to register pain.

• Diet and Nutrition •

It is very important that you eat healthily, especially if you are breast-feeding. You don't necessarily need high-fat food, but you may need to eat frequent, small meals that are well-balanced (don't neglect the protein component). Hydration is also very important.

• Post-partum depression •

To varying degrees, a lot of women suffer some form of post-partum depression. Usually, it may last only a few days or weeks, and can best be described as a feeling of mild depression, or "the blues", that results from dealing with this substantial change in your life. It also may have a hormonal component.

It is very important to describe these feelings to your doctor should you have them. There is no shame in it; it is a perfectly normal part of the process for a lot of women. However, it becomes a cause for concern if it is severe, long-lasting, and making an impact on the health of the mother and baby. Please ask for help if you need it. You cannot care for your baby well if you have intense feelings of isolation, sadness and despair. Help is necessary, and easily available.

