



# Your Pregnancy

So, you have decided to continue with your pregnancy. Perhaps you are excited or worried about what lies ahead. There are many steps you can take to help yourself through to pregnancy & to gain confidence for childbirth. This chapter provides you with some general information about having a healthy & safe pregnancy.

## Books about Pregnancy & Birth

There is a huge range of pregnancy books available from your library. These give you detailed information on pregnancy month-by-month, & help you to prepare for birth & your new baby. Make sure you get one that has been published recently, & preferably in Aotearoa New Zealand, so you get up-to-date information.

## Your basic rules of pregnancy

**Eat a balanced diet** Get your prenatal care by making & keeping regular appointments with your Lead Maternity Carer (LMC) **Relax when you can & get plenty of sleep** **Avoid immunizations, X rays, & any drugs that are not medically necessary** **Avoid alcohol, cigarettes, marijuana, & all illicit & recreational drugs** **Limit drinks that contain caffeine (e.g. coffee, tea, cola, energy drinks)** **Stay active** Check with your LMC about suitable kinds of exercise but low-impact activities e.g. walking, swimming, dancing are all good **Avoid overheating – saunas, spas & electric blankets can raise body heat too much** **Tell your dentist you are pregnant before having any dental work** **Keep away from pesticides & herbicides e.g. garden sprays** **Don't hang out with anyone who makes you feel bad** **Keep away from paint fumes, solvents e.g. varnish & glue** **Be aware of the infections that harm unborn babies**

*“I think some pregnant teenagers feel bad about being pregnant, or maybe embarrassed & this stops them from enjoying & being interested in their pregnancy & looking after themselves. This is sad because getting into your pregnancy is awesome & is really the logical thing to do once you are pregnant; I mean you may as well enjoy it. When I was pregnant & feeling down on myself, or like not going into town in case ex-school friends saw my fat tummy, I reminded myself that I was beautiful & that I wasn't gonna let other peoples' bad attitude stop me from enjoying my pregnancy.”*

**Alice (age 18)**

## *Eat well*

Eating well means eating a variety of foods. To make sure you have an adequate diet & get all the nutrients you need, eat some foods from each of these 4 food groups every day:

- 1 Fruit & vegetables, including raw or lightly cooked**
- 2 Bread & cereals, some wholegrain**
- 3 Pasturised milk products – milk, cheese, yogurt, ice cream**
- 4 Meat, poultry, fish, eggs, peas, beans & lentils**

If you usually eat a lot of junk food (e.g. takeaways, sweets, biscuits, potato chips, soft drinks) you will need to limit the amount you eat because junk food won't give you the nutrients you need for pregnancy.

**The best way to know how much you need to eat is to listen to your appetite. Don't forget to drink plenty of water each day.**

Dieting or cutting down on the amount of food you eat to control your weight isn't a good idea. You may be drained of energy & tired, & it may cause your baby's weight to be less than it should be. That means that the baby may have trouble coping with labour & birth. Also, your milk supply can be reduced.

*Get free copies of **Eating for Healthy Pregnant Women & Eating for Healthy Breastfeeding Women & Your Pregnancy/To Haputanga** mailed to you. Phone your closest Public Health Resource Centre. For the number look up your local District Health Board in the hospitals section of the white pages in the telephone book.*

You have to be most careful about what you put in your body during the first trimester of your pregnancy (the first 3 months). This is when the embryo is in “formation” & all your baby’s organs are developing. After this time, you’re in the “growth” stage; the fetus gets bigger & stronger every day. If you are concerned about what you have already put into body before you knew you were pregnant e.g. alcohol, prescription drugs, talk to your Lead Maternity Carer (LMC) & try not to stress out too much. Focus on the here & now!

## *Alcohol*

It’s not safe to drink alcohol during pregnancy. You should avoid it altogether & there are some very good reasons why. Every time you drink alcohol, your bloodstream carries it through the placenta to the baby. Drinking can cause Foetal Alcohol Syndrome that can have these effects:

- **Deformities of the baby’s head, limbs, heart & brain**
- **Low birth weight**
- **Birth complications**
- **As babies grow up they can have learning, behaviour & social difficulties**
- **Baby can die shortly after birth**

Sometimes it’s harder to say no to alcohol if you are hanging out with people who are drinking. Let your friends know that you can’t drink alcohol & spend time with them when they are not drinking. If you have a partner, it can be helpful if they reduce their drinking. If you need help to stop drinking, your first point of contact is the nearest Community Alcohol & Drug Service (CADS). You will be doing yourself & your baby a huge favour that you will be proud of. Remember, they are there to help not to judge.

## *Smoking*

**People will say you should give up smoking now you are pregnant. They are right because smoking is linked to many health problems. Giving up smoking helps a woman to:**

- Have a normal weight baby. Smokers tend to have smaller babies & this can be dangerous. Some people think that smoking will help keep the baby’s weight down & that they will have an easier birth. This isn’t true. A lower birth weight baby is more likely to have health problems.
- Reduce the risk of miscarriage & birth complications.

- Reduce the risk of the baby suffering from SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome / Cot Death), pneumonia, wheeze, asthma or glue ear.
- Live longer
- Save money

## Call the Quitline

0800 778 778

[www.quit.co.nz](http://www.quit.co.nz)

Available 24 hours a day. An adviser will listen, offer support & let you know where to go for help in your area. Most advisers are ex-smokers who are experienced at helping people to stop smoking.

**If you are a smoker, quit. If you find this impossible, you should reduce the number you smoke. Remember that passive smoking (breathing other peoples' smoke) also poses a risk so avoid being in rooms with smokers, or ask them to smoke outside.**

### *After the birth*

**Smokefree parents. It's best to stay smokefree permanently. If this isn't possible, it's essential to stay smokefree till the baby is at least 1 year old.**

**Smokefree home. If you are still smoking, aim for a smokefree home. Smoke outside & keep all cigarettes & smoke away from the baby.**

**Smokefree zone. If you can't ban smoking inside the home, aim for a smokefree zone. Your baby deserves a smokefree zone & a smokefree bedroom. Don't smoke while breastfeeding. Your baby should not share your bed if you are a smoker because of the risk of SIDS (cot death).**

### *Medication*

Tell your chemist you are pregnant when buying over-the-counter medications. This means all kinds of medicines from pills, tablets & ointments to cough mixtures & headache remedies. The wrong medicines can harm the developing baby. Paracetamol (e.g. Panadol) is the recommended form of pain relief because it is safe for pregnant women if taken as directed. With all prescribed medications, check with your doctor before you take them.



## *Marijuana*

Just like alcohol, every time you smoke marijuana, your bloodstream carries it through the placenta to the baby. There is increasing concern about marijuana use in pregnancy so you should avoid it.

## *Illicit & recreational drugs*

You should not use illicit (illegal) & recreational drugs while you are pregnant (or breastfeeding). Drugs such as speed (in all forms), ecstasy, LSD (acid), GBH, cocaine & heroin, should all be avoided. Many of these drugs have been linked to causing serious birth defects in babies, complicated birth & low birth weight babies, breathing difficulties, & behavioural & social problems as babies grow up. If you use drugs & don't think you can stop, your first point of contact is the nearest Community Alcohol & Drug Service (CADS).

## Vitamin supplements

As a general rule, vitamin & mineral supplements aren't needed so avoid taking them, particularly in the early months of pregnancy as they may affect the baby. Eating a balanced diet is the best way to get all the nutrients required. However, the following supplements are recommended for pregnancy & are safe if taken as directed. For the first 3 months of pregnancy, taking one tablet of folic acid daily will help prevent spina bifida (serious deformity of the spine) in the developing baby. Because you are a teenager & therefore still growing yourself, you will require a good dietary intake of calcium & iron while pregnant & breastfeeding. Ask your doctor about prescribing you supplements. You can also buy iron & calcium supplements at a chemist.

## Herbal products

Make sure that you check out all herbal products with a trained herbalist or doctor before taking any herbal medications, as some herbs can be harmful during pregnancy.

## Infections

**Some infections during pregnancy can cause damage to the unborn child. It's important that you are aware of these & take steps to avoid them.** *It's important that you have the routine antenatal blood test because it can detect infections as well as show which infections you have been immunised against, if you aren't sure.*

**Rubella** (German measles). Most people have been immunised against rubella, but ask your doctor to check if you're not sure. If a woman catches rubella in the early months of pregnancy the baby may be born damaged. If possible, avoid anyone with rubella, but if you think you have been near someone with it, tell your doctor immediately.

**Listeriosis** Listeria is a common bacterium which is found in soil, water, plants & in the faeces (poop) of animals & humans. It rarely causes disease in humans, but you need to be aware of it because of the effect it can have on unborn babies. The biggest risk from Listeria infection is when a woman is pregnant & eats contaminated food; it can cause miscarriage & stillbirth. If discovered early it can be treated with antibiotics.

**Here's how you can reduce the risk:**

- **Safe food handling, keep hands, benches, teatowels clean**
- **Cooking or reheating food until 'piping hot' throughout**
- **Eating freshly cooked food**
- **Thoroughly washing raw fruit & vegetables**

## Don't eat:

- Pre-cooked seafood, chicken, ham, meat products & pate
- Uncooked seafoods
- Stored salads & coleslaws
- Raw (unpasteurised) milk

Also, if you live on or visit a farm, you should not be involved in feeding out or assisting a cow that is miscarrying or has miscarried. This is because *Listeria* organisms are present in ensilage.

**Toxoplasmosis** This can be caught from cat faeces (poop). The infection can be unnoticeable to the mother, but it can damage the unborn baby. Avoid handling cat poop (e.g. the kitty litter) & make sure you always wash your hands after handling cats.



## *What can fathers-to-be do?*

There are a number of things that fathers-to-be can do during pregnancy & to prepare for the birth, for example:

- **Read books on pregnancy & birth**
- **Support the mother if she is quitting smoking by quitting too or not smoking around her**
- **Prepare to have a smokefree environment for baby**
- **Support the mother if she is quitting drinking by reducing your alcohol intake**
- **Participate in antenatal classes**
- **Talk with other fathers about their experiences**
- **Talk with your family/whanau about how you feel**

## Choosing a Lead Maternity Carer (LMC)

When you are pregnant you need to choose an LMC. This is the person who will be responsible for providing & organising your maternity care, creating your care plan with you, & attending your labour & birth. You should aim to have your first antenatal visit & register with your LMC when you are around 14 weeks pregnant.

**Maternity care is free for New Zealand citizens, women with permanent residency & those who have a permit to stay for 2 years or more. However, care provided by a private obstetrician usually involves a cost to the woman.**

**An LMC can be a midwife (self-employed or hospital-based), a general practitioner (GP), or a specialist obstetrician.** You should think about what sort of care you want & where you are planning to deliver your baby (e.g. at home, in a birthing unit, or in a maternity hospital). If you are Maori, you may like to choose a Maori midwife who provides for the needs of wahine Maori during pregnancy & who supports traditional birth practices for Maori whanau. Make sure that you choose an LMC who you feel comfortable with & can talk to. Remember that you can change your LMC at any time if you are not happy with your care.

For a Maternity Services Information Kit & for details of LMC's in your area call

0800-mum-2be

0800 686 223

## Why do you need an LMC?

It's very important that you register with an LMC & keep your regular appointments. Sometimes, young pregnant women don't access maternity care, & arrive at a hospital to deliver their baby having had no professional care & support. Perhaps they don't get maternity care because they are shy, embarrassed, afraid, or are hiding the pregnancy. This is dangerous for you & your baby. Maternity care will help you

to have a healthy & safe pregnancy & birth, as well as help you & baby get off to the best possible start. An LMC is specially trained to work with you & support you in having good health during pregnancy, with the goal of having a healthy baby. They can recognise problems during pregnancy & arrange the right treatment. Your LMC provides you with information on your health & well-being & choices for birth. **If you are shy, embarrassed, afraid, or are hiding your pregnancy, you will probably find that having your first appointment with an LMC will not be as scary as you think.** In fact, many pregnant young women find that their LMC becomes a treasured source of information, trust & support.

What if you are worried about being 'looked down on', judged, or treated unfairly because you are a young mother? It's helpful to remember that you have rights guaranteed by the law known as the Code of Health & Disability Services Consumers' Rights. They apply to all health or disability services, whether you pay for them or not. This law gives you a number of rights including the right to:

- **Respect – You should always be treated with respect. This includes respect for your culture, values & beliefs, as well as your right to personal privacy.**
- **Fair Treatment – No one should discriminate against you, pressure you into something you don't want or take advantage of you in any way.**
- **Complaints – It's ok to complain. Your complaints help improve service. It must be easy for you to make a complaint.**

## *Prepare for childbirth*

Preparing for childbirth helps you to understand your body & the birth process & helps you cope with labour. Here are some ways you can prepare:

### **choose** your birth partner

A birth partner is someone you know who is happy to be a support person for you through your pregnancy & birth. Perhaps a family/whanau member, a close friend, or partner. Birth partners should go to antenatal classes with you & be there to help throughout your labour & delivery.

## Antenatal classes

Antenatal classes can help you to prepare for childbirth because they:

- 1 Provide information to help you keep fit & healthy through pregnancy**
- 2 Tell you about what your body is going to go through during labour**
- 3 Teach coping skills for labour**
- 4 Introduce you to other parents-to-be**
- 5 Teach you about breastfeeding**

Sometimes pregnant young women don't enrol in antenatal classes because they are worried that they won't fit in or have anything in common with the other women. Sometimes they worry that the class will be filled with 'couples' & they are on their own. Keep in mind that women who go to antenatal classes are more prepared for childbirth, so it's important that you go. In some areas there are classes especially for mothers-to-be aged under 20. In some areas there are classes run by Maori for Maori. These classes embrace traditional birth & parenting practises for Maori whanau. In some areas there are classes for Pacific Island women. Find out about the classes in your area & choose one that suits you best. For contacts look under *Childbirth Education* in the service directory provided with this booklet.

If you can't go to antenatal classes for some reason, then you can be mailed a course in pregnancy & childbirth that you can do at home. Write to the Adult Open Learning Service, Correspondence School, Private Bag, Wellington.

### preparing at home

There are heaps of things you can do at home, for example:

**Read books & magazine articles**

**Write down questions to ask your LMC or at your next antenatal class**

**Talk with other pregnant women about how they feel**

**Talk with other mothers about their labour & birth**

**Talk about how you are feeling with your family & whanau**

**Practise the relaxation & birth exercises that you learn**