

Planning a pregnancy?

**A good start begins before
you conceive**

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Planning a pregnancy?

Are you thinking about having children? There is much you can do, even before you become pregnant, to increase the chances of a healthy pregnancy outcome.

Do you or your partner have any health problems, or does a disease tend to run in your family? Do you ever use medication, including over-the-counter drugs? Are there any occupational health risks for you and/or your partner? Were there any complications during a previous pregnancy?

If any of the above is applicable, or if you would like to know what you can do in preparation for your pregnancy, this leaflet has some important information for you.

Be well prepared

Most women are already two weeks pregnant before they are aware of their pregnancy, but your unborn child is particularly vulnerable during the first weeks of your pregnancy. Fortunately, most children are born healthy, but being well prepared helps to decrease the risk of health problems during pregnancy. This leaflet provides some useful tips. You are also encouraged to consult your family doctor, your midwife or your gynaecologist for advice before you get pregnant.

**Did you know...
...that once a pregnancy test is positive, you're already at least two weeks pregnant?**

www.zwangerwijzer.nl

You can assess for yourself whether you, your partner or your child may run possible health risks: go to www.zwangerwijzer.nl and fill out the questionnaire. The website also has information and advice you can use in preparing for a visit to your family doctor, midwife or gynaecologist.

What can you do before you get pregnant?

The following list gives some tips for preparing for a healthy pregnancy. Some are easy to follow, such as taking a folic acid supplement every day to reduce the risk of having a child with spina bifida. Others may be more difficult, such as quitting smoking or losing weight. If you need help or advice, ask your doctor, midwife or gynaecologist, or have your doctor refer you to a specialist.

There may be circumstances such as a chronic disease or medication use which might influence you and your child's health during pregnancy. It certainly makes sense to address the chances that a disease may exacerbate or may diminish during pregnancy. Moreover, there are often other options available to minimise risks.



**Did you know...
... that all the baby's organs have been developed by the third month of pregnancy?**



Take a folic acid tablet daily

Taking folic acid supplements during pregnancy greatly reduces the risk of a neural tube defect in the baby. It is recommended to start taking these tablets (one 0.4 – 0.5mg tablet a day) at least 4 weeks before you try to conceive and to continue to take them until you are 10 weeks pregnant. Folic acid tablets can be bought without a prescription at any pharmacy.

Use medication accordingly

Use of certain medication may have a negative impact on your fertility and on the health of your future child. This includes some over-the-counter drugs. Discuss this in advance with your midwife, doctor or pharmacist. If you do use medication for a chronic illness, your doctor may be able to suggest a safer alternative.



Avoid risks at work

Your work environment can have a negative impact on your fertility and the health of your future child. This may be the case, for instance:

- if you are exposed to toxic substances like solvents, pesticides, herbicides, fungicides, anaesthetics, chemotherapy, heavy metals or other chemicals;
- if you are exposed to radiation;
- if you are exposed to the risk of infection.

You should think about discussing these risks with the company medical officer before pregnancy. You might need extra protection. If you don't have a company medical officer, contact your midwife, family doctor, gynaecologist, or employer.

**Did you know...
... over-the-counter medicines like ibuprofen can also harm your pregnancy?**

Stop drinking, smoking, or taking drugs

Cigarettes, alcohol and drugs can seriously damage your fertility, your pregnancy, and the health of your unborn child. The same goes for passive smoking, when you breathe in someone else's cigarette smoke.



Eat healthy food

Whether you plan to get pregnant or you already are, it is very important to eat a well-balanced diet. Avoid soft cheese made from unpasteurized milk as well as pre-packaged raw fish. If you eat meat, fish or shellfish, make sure they are cooked thoroughly. Wash fruit and vegetables carefully, and keep raw products covered in the refrigerator. Be careful with liver or liver products, as they may contain too much vitamin A.

Try to maintain a healthy body weight

A normal body weight is important for your fertility, for your pregnancy, and for the health of your unborn baby. Both obesity and underweight are unhealthy. If you want to lose weight, try to do so well in advance; this is safer than losing weight right before or during your pregnancy. Would you like advice on how to stay in shape? Ask your family doctor, your midwife, or a dietician. It's important to be active for at least 30 minutes every day. This helps to keep you fit and healthy. 'Being active' doesn't mean working out; taking a walk, a bicycle ride, or vacuum cleaning count as well!



Protect yourself against infections

Infections can harm your unborn child. Here are some tips for avoiding infections:

- Have someone else change the cat litter.
- Wear gloves while gardening.
- Find out whether you have been vaccinated against any diseases, including childhood diseases, such as German measles. If not, get vaccinated before pregnancy.
- Do you need vaccinations for a planned trip abroad? Have them administered before you get pregnant.
- Do you (possibly) have an STD (sexually transmitted disease)? Arrange a check-up with your family doctor or at an STD clinic. STDs are generally easy to treat.



Did you know...
... there is a lot you can do to give your child a healthy start – even before you conceive?

If you have a chronic condition, get medical advice

A chronic health condition – such as high blood pressure, diabetes, epilepsy, or mental illness, for example – can affect your fertility, pregnancy, and the health of your future child. The pregnancy can also affect your condition. Ask your doctor for advice.

If you had any problems with your last pregnancy, get medical advice

You may have had two or more miscarriages in the past. Or perhaps you had pre-eclampsia, or the baby was growth-restricted. Sometimes treatment makes it possible to reduce the chance of problems in a future pregnancy. Ask your gynaecologist, midwife or family doctor for advice.



Consider: are there any hereditary diseases in the family?

Out of every 100 children born, 2 or 3 have a congenital disease (a birth defect). Your baby runs a higher risk of being born with a congenital disease if:

- a hereditary or congenital disease runs in your family or in your partner's family;
- you and your partner are related, for instance if you are cousins;
- your parents or grandparents come from an area where hereditary anaemia is more common: Africa, Mediterranean countries such as Morocco and Turkey, the Middle East, the Far East (Asia), Suriname, the Antilles and the Caribbean.



Does any of the above apply to you or your partner? If so, ask your family doctor, gynaecologist or midwife for advice. If there is a risk of hereditary disease, have a check-up: this can be done before you become pregnant, which gives you more time – and more options – to make an informed choice.

If you have a chronic illness, ...
Did you know
... you can seek advice on health risks for you and your baby before pregnancy?

Advanced maternal age increases risks

As you get older, it tends to take longer to get pregnant. You also run a higher risk of a miscarriage, of problems during pregnancy, or of a chromosomal defect in the baby.

What can partners do?

Men can also help to give their future child a healthy start, even before the pregnancy.

- Certain medication can make men less fertile, or can affect the health of the unborn child. Read the prescription information leaflet carefully, or ask your family doctor or your pharmacy for advice.

**Did you know...
... that occupational exposure to toxic agents can also reduce male fertility?**



- Are you exposed to toxic materials or radiation at work? This may make you less fertile. It also increases the risk of your child having a birth defect. Ask your company medical officer for advice.

- If you smoke, drink alcohol or use drugs, this may decrease fertility. If you cannot quit, don't smoke anywhere near your partner as passive smoking may also harm the child.



- Consider whether you might have an STD (sexually transmitted disease). This may make you less fertile, and if you infect your partner before or during her pregnancy, it may seriously harm your unborn baby. Get yourself tested or treated by your family doctor or a STD clinic.

Would you like more information?

The internet offers detailed information on a wide variety of related subjects:

General information

www.zwangerwijzer.nl
www.zwangerstraks.nl
www.klaarvooreenkind.nl
www.knov.nl
www.nvog.nl
www.nhg.org
www.kiesbeter.nl

Work

www.rijksoverheid.nl/ministeries/szw
www.arboportaal.nl

Infectious diseases / vaccinations

www.rijksvaccinatieprogramma.nl
www.rivm.nl/cib/themas/Zwangerschap

Smoking

www.stivoro.nl/zwangerschap
www.rookvrijzwanger.nl

Alcohol

www.alcoholenzwangerschap.nl
www.alcoholinfo.nl

Drugs

www.jellinek.nl
www.trimbos.nl

Nutrition

www.slikeerstfoliumzuur.nl
www.voedingscentrum.nl

Sport and activity

www.nisb.nl

STDs

www.soa aids.nl

Hereditary disease

www.erfelijkheid.nl

This leaflet was developed by the Erfocentrum and the RIVM in close collaboration with a pre-conception care working group comprising representatives of the following organizations:

- the Netherlands Society of Obstetrics and Gynaecology
(Nederlandse Vereniging voor Obstetrie en Gynaecologie, NVOG)
- the Dutch College of General Practitioners
(Nederlands Huisartsen Genootschap, NHG)
- Dutch Society for Clinical Genetics
(Vereniging Klinische Genetica Nederland, VKGN)
- Dutch Parents' and Patients' Organization of Genetic Support Groups
(Vereniging Samenwerkende Ouder- en Patiëntenorganisaties, VSOP)
- the Opvoeden.nl Foundation (Stichting Opvoeden.nl)
- the virtual Centre for Youth and Family
(virtueel Centrum voor Jeugd en Gezin, vCJG)
- the Child and Hospital foundation (Stichting Kind en Ziekenhuis)
- the Netherlands Association for Community Health Services (GGD Nederland)

Other organizations who also worked on this leaflet:

- the Netherlands Nutrition Centre Foundation (Stichting Voedingscentrum)
- Pharos, a national knowledge centre for immigrants, refugees and health
- the Trimbos Instituut, a national knowledge centre for mental health care, addiction care and social work
- Rutgers WPF, a knowledge centre for sexuality
- STIVORO, a tobacco prevention expertise centre
- the Netherlands Institute for Sport and Physical Activity
(Nederlands Instituut voor Sport en Bewegen, NISB)
- the Netherlands Center for Occupational Diseases
(Nederlands Centrum voor Beroepsziekten, NCvB)
- STD AIDS Netherlands (Soa Aids Nederland)

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