



GIVING BIRTH IN A NEW LAND

A guide for women new
to Canada and their families

Part 2 – Finding the health care you need during pregnancy

You are pregnant. Congratulations!

This resource will help you learn more about having a baby in Canada. The way things happen here may be different from the country you came from. This resource focuses on Ontario.

There are 4 parts to this resource. This is part 2 of 4. All the parts can be downloaded at www.beststart.org/resources/rep_health. Make sure you have access to the information you need.

- Part 1: Getting the help you need
- **Part 2: Finding the health care you need during pregnancy**
- Part 3: Getting ready for your baby
- Part 4: Having your baby

The medical information in this resource relates to healthy pregnancies. If you have any medical questions or concerns, talk with your health care provider to get advice that applies to your pregnancy.

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A **health care provider** is a professional health care worker.

As a pregnant woman in Ontario, your health care providers may include:

- doctors
- midwives
- nurse practitioners

It is important to visit a health care provider as soon as you think you are pregnant. This may be different from the way things are done in your home country.

Finding health services

The health care providers who help pregnant women in Ontario may include:

- A family doctor, who provides health care when you are pregnant and helps you deliver the baby.
- A family doctor, who provides health care when you are pregnant and then may refer you to an obstetrician who will help you deliver the baby.
- A nurse practitioner who provides you with care when you are pregnant. Towards the end of your pregnancy, she will refer you to an obstetrician, a family doctor, or a midwife.
- A midwife, who provides health care when you are pregnant, helps you deliver the baby, and cares for you until the baby is 6 weeks old. In Ontario, midwives are registered health care professionals and have graduated from a university midwifery program. You do NOT need a doctor to refer you to a midwife; you can call one yourself.

It may be very hard to find a health care provider in Ontario. In some areas, there is a shortage. That is why it is important to start to find one as soon as you know you are pregnant – or even before!

Here are some tips on how to find a health care provider:

- Ask friends, family, and your local public health unit if they know a health care provider who accepts new patients.
- Look in the Yellow Pages of your local phone book. Search for **Physicians & Surgeons**. Be aware that you will need a referral from a family doctor to see a specialist such as an obstetrician or gynaecologist.
- Register with Health Care Connect. This service helps people in Ontario find a local doctor or nurse practitioner who accepts new patients. (1 800 445 1822; www.ontario.ca/healthcareconnect)
- Use the Doctor Search service of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario to locate a doctor in your area. (www.cpsso.on.ca/docsearch)

- Call your local hospital for a list of doctors who will accept new patients. For a list of Ontario hospitals visit: www.thehealthline.ca or you can look in the Yellow Pages of your telephone book under **Hospitals**.
- Your local settlement agency may have a list of doctors who will accept new patients or who speak your language.
- You may want to use a walk-in medical clinic. Many hospitals have walk-in clinics for non-emergency health issues. You may not be able to see the same doctor each time you go to this kind of clinic. To find a walk-in clinic, look under **Clinics-Medical** in the Yellow Pages of the phone book.
- You can find a midwife in your area by contacting the Association of Ontario Midwives. (1-866-418-3773; www.aom.on.ca)

Paying for health services

You can receive medical services after you arrive in Ontario but the services are not always free.

During your first 3 months in Ontario, you are NOT covered under the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP).

It is best to get private health coverage BEFORE you arrive in Ontario. Once you are in Ontario, if you plan to purchase private health coverage, you must do it during the first 5 days after you arrive and pay for it.

- If you do not have private health insurance during the first 3 months, you must expect to pay for any services you need.
- Details about this are available at www.settlement.org.

If you are a refugee

Before your OHIP coverage begins, you can get emergency and essential health services through the Interim Federal Health Program (www.servicecanada.gc.ca/eng/goc/interim_health.shtml), or call 1-888-242-2100.

Ontario Health Insurance Program = OHIP



For information on the health insurance program for Ontario, visit www.health.gov.on.ca/en/public/programs/ohip/ or call the **ServiceOntario**, Infoline at 1-866-532-3161

More details about health costs

- 1) It is possible to receive some health care services without OHIP coverage at community health centres (www.ontariohc.org) and through midwives (www.aom.on.ca). Many services such as Healthy Babies Healthy Children and Infant Hearing are also free.
- 2) If you need to take an ambulance to a hospital, your Ontario Health Card will pay for most of the cost but you will need to pay part of the fee. If the doctor who sees you at the hospital does not think that you truly needed to take an ambulance or if you do not have health coverage, you will have to pay the full cost. This can be very expensive.
- 3) If you have to pay for health care, find out if your health care provider or hospital will agree to a payment plan, such as paying some of the total each month, instead of all at once. Discuss these plans with your health care provider while you are pregnant.

When prenatal visits and tests will happen

Make an appointment with your health care provider as soon as you think you are pregnant. Your first visit will likely last a little longer than the ones that follow. During the first visit:

- You will be asked about your medical history.
- Your health care provider will suggest you have urine and blood tests. These tests are very useful to prevent health problems but you can decide to have these tests or not.
- Your health care provider will do a physical exam, and may do an internal examination at this point.

After this first visit, the usual timing for future visits is:

Number of weeks of pregnancy	How often will you see your health care provider?
0 to 28 weeks	Every four weeks
29 to 36 weeks	Every two weeks
After 36 weeks	Every week

Your health care provider may offer you these tests:

Number of weeks of pregnancy	Name and description of test
Around 18 weeks	If you agree, an ultrasound test will be done in a hospital or clinic. The purpose of the ultrasound test is to help confirm the baby's due date and to check the baby's growth and development.
At 24 to 28 weeks	A blood test to look for diabetes caused by pregnancy (gestational diabetes) will be done, if you agree.
Your health care provider may offer you other tests depending on the results of the ultrasound, your health, your age, your medical history, etc. Make sure you understand the purpose of each test. You are free to decide whether or not to have these tests done.	

Know Your Rights

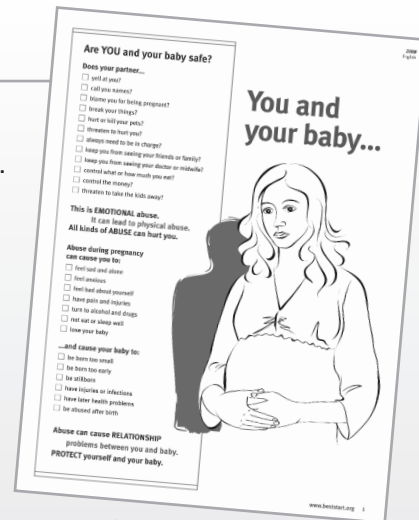
In Ontario, it is against the law for an employer to treat a woman differently because she is pregnant, has had a baby, is breastfeeding or may become pregnant. It is also against the law to fire a woman from her job, demote her, or lay her off because she is pregnant.

If you have special needs when you are pregnant, such as going to medical appointments or problems doing your job, discuss these with your employer. For more information, visit the Ontario Human Rights Commission website at www.ohrc.on.ca or phone 1-800-387-9080.

Canada does not allow abuse

In Canada, emotional and physical abuse are against the law. Many groups can help people who are being abused. Abuse can take different forms: verbal, sexual, physical, etc. Your health care provider can help you find the help that you need.

A woman who has permanent resident status cannot lose that status or be forced to leave Canada because she leaves a relationship where there was abuse. This is true even if her abusive partner is her sponsor. For information, you can download the the fact sheet ***You and your baby*** (in 10 languages) at www.beststart.org/resources/anti-violence. Or call the Assaulted Women's Helpline 1-866-863-0511. It offers a confidential and free counseling service in 150 languages.



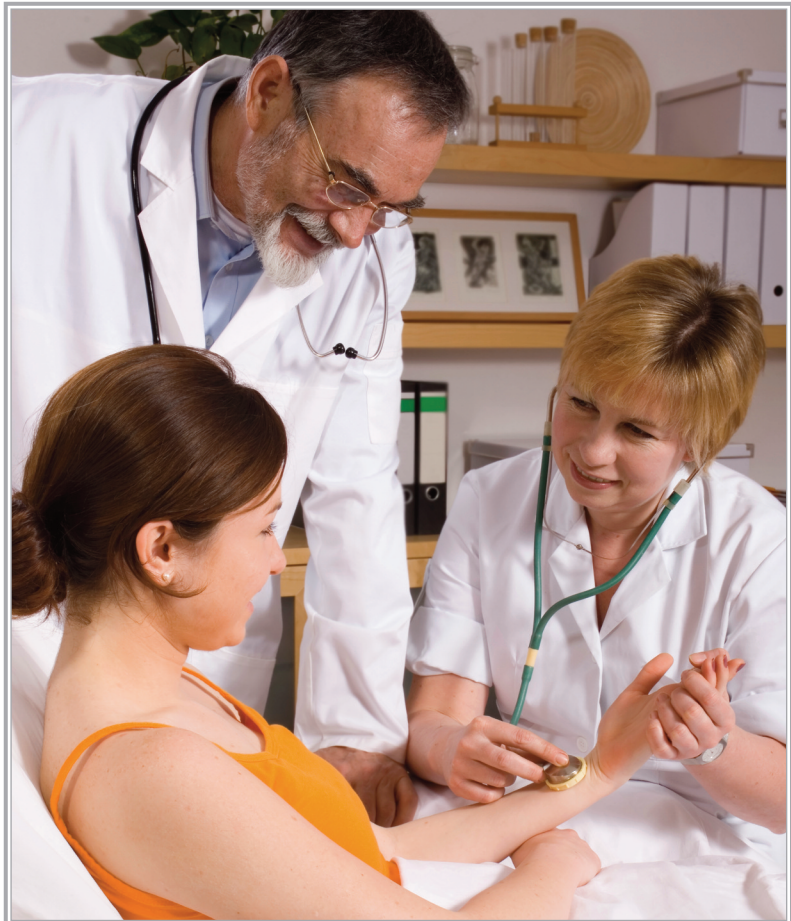


Neighbours, Friends & Families

Neighbours, Friends and Families is a website that describes the signs of woman abuse so that people who care about her can help. It also provides information so those close to a man who needs help changing his behaviour, can help. Visit: www.neighboursfriendsandfamilies.ca.

Tips on talking to health care providers

- Before each visit, write down any questions you have. If you do not speak English well, ask for an interpreter to go with you, especially for your first appointment. If that is not possible, have someone help you translate your written questions.
- Try to learn some important words that you will need during pregnancy, childbirth, and once the baby is born. Your local public health unit may have pamphlets and books on these topics to help you learn the key words.
- Health care providers should explain any treatment or procedure they feel you need or suggest you have. You need to make sure you understand the explanation. You have the right to accept or refuse treatment. You can consult with family members or friends, but you are the person who will decide what to do. Don't be afraid to ask as many questions as you like.



What to expect

Your health care provider will probably ask you questions like these, especially at your first visit:

- How are you feeling?
- What was the date your last menstrual period started?
- What are you eating and drinking? How hungry are you?
- What type of work are you doing? What other activities do you often do?
- Where do you live? Who lives with you?
- What is your medical history: Have you been pregnant before? Do you have physical or mental health issues? Are you taking any medication? What immunizations (vaccines) have you received?
- Do you have any family history of physical or mental illness?
- Are you coping with a lot of stress?
- Are you in a situation where someone is hurting you or you do not feel safe?
- What can you tell me about your pregnancies and childbirth in the past?

Make sure you give honest answers to all the questions. You can choose to talk to your health care provider alone if you prefer.

- You may want to have a female health care provider, such as a midwife. If one is not available, you may need to receive health care from a man.
- You can ask to have your husband, partner or a family member with you when you have a physical examination and during childbirth. You can also ask to be alone with your health care provider at any time. If you are having difficulty meeting your health care provider alone, contact the office before your visit and mention it so they can help you.
- In Canada, birth plans are often done by parents, to explain in writing their preferences to the people who will help them deliver the baby. It is always best to have a birth plan written in English and to give your health care provider a copy during your pregnancy. Take it with you to the hospital. Your birth plan can include:
 - What you prefer on subjects such as help with starting labour, pain relief, birthing positions, and medical procedures.
 - Who will make decisions for you if you are not able to do so during labour.
 - Your cultural or religious preferences, such as circumcision of your baby son or saying what the sex of the child is.
 - Other items that may be important to you.

Do not assume that things in Canada will be the same as your home country. Your hospital may have staff to help with cultural preferences. The health care provider or hospital may not be able to do everything you want, but will try.

Writing your birth plan

Some websites provide sample birth plans. They can give you ideas about what you may want to include in your own birth plan. Make sure your plan reflects your wishes. Discuss it with the person who will attend the birth with you and with your health care provider.

To learn more about how to write a birth plan, visit the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada's website at: www.sogc.org/health/pregnancy-birth-plan_e.asp.



Important Signs to Watch For If You are Pregnant

- Bad cramps or stomach pains that don't go away
- Spotting or bleeding from your vagina
- Trickle or gush of fluid from your vagina
- Lower back pain/pressure, or change in lower backache
- A feeling that the baby is pushing down
- Contractions, or change in the strength or number of them
- An increase in the amount of vaginal discharge
- Fever, chills, dizziness, vomiting or bad headaches
- Blurred vision or spots before your eyes
- Sudden or severe swelling of your feet, hands or face
- A decrease in your baby's movement
- Being in a motor vehicle (i.e., car) accident

Go to the hospital right away and contact your doctor/midwife if you have any of these symptoms!

www.beststart.org

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