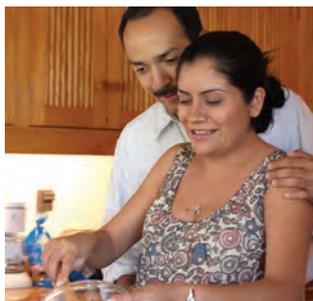




Waiting for Baby: Pregnancy After Age 35



For women aged 35 and older who are pregnant or planning a pregnancy

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Deciding to become a parent is one of life's most important decisions. More women than ever are age 35 years or older when pregnant or planning a pregnancy.

This brochure is for women age 35 and older who are pregnant or planning to become pregnant. It shares information that is useful to women in many different life situations. Perhaps you are planning a pregnancy or you just found out that you are pregnant. Your pregnancy may be planned or unexpected. You may be experiencing a first pregnancy or you may already have children. The information in this booklet will guide you before and during your pregnancy, and in early parenting too.

Planning for a Pregnancy

Planning your pregnancy gives you the advantage of being as healthy as possible before conceiving. Making changes before pregnancy can improve your health and the health of your future children.

Even before pregnancy you can help your baby:

- ✓ Take a prenatal vitamin supplement with folic acid. Start at least 3 months before you hope to conceive and continue taking folic acid throughout your pregnancy. For more information visit: www.healthypregnancy.gc.ca
- ✓ Visit your health care provider. Talk about any medical conditions or medications you are taking including prescription drugs, over-the-counter drugs and herbal remedies. For more information visit: www.motherisk.org or call 1-416-813-6780.
- ✓ Consider the health history of your family and your partner's family. If you are concerned about family health history, talk to your health care provider about genetic screening for you and your partner before conceiving a pregnancy.
- ✓ Talk to your health care provider about possible risks at work that may impact your pregnancy. Some examples are working long hours, prolonged standing and strenuous work. For more information see "Work & Pregnancy Do Mix" brochure at: www.beststart.org
- ✓ Quit smoking, avoid second hand smoke and don't drink any alcohol.
- ✓ Continue regular, non-strenuous exercise such as walking and using the stairs instead of the elevator. If you are not currently physically active, talk to your health care provider about starting to become more active.

For more information about planning a pregnancy visit:
www.healthbeforepregnancy.ca



What about Male Partners?

If you are planning a pregnancy, your partner may want information about men's reproductive health. For more information see the "Men's Information – How to Build a Healthy Baby" brochure by Best Start Resource Centre at: www.beststart.org

Conceiving a Pregnancy

It may take longer to conceive if you are age 35 or older. It is important to get help early if you are age 35 or older and have concerns about conceiving a pregnancy. Talk to your health care provider about a referral to a fertility specialist if you:

- are concerned about your fertility.
- have been trying to conceive a pregnancy for 6 months or longer without success.
- have experienced two or more miscarriages.

Many couples with fertility concerns will conceive a pregnancy. For more information visit: www.cfsh.ca

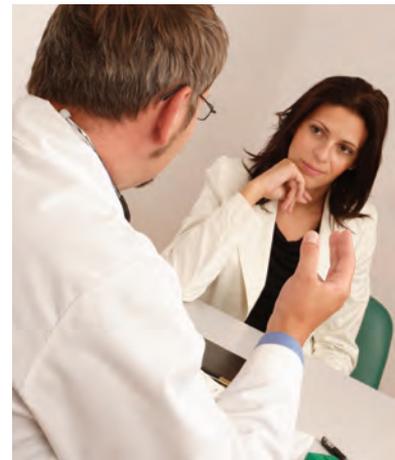
Fertility decreases with age for both men and women. The success rate of ART (Assisted Reproductive Technology) also decreases with age. If you are a woman aged 35 or older, and want to start a family some time in the future, talk to your health care provider. Some women, depending on their age, general health or signs of approaching menopause, may be advised that they should plan their pregnancy sooner, rather than later.

If you are Having Difficulty Conceiving a Pregnancy...

You may feel disappointed after each menstrual cycle and frustrated that conceiving seems to be beyond your control. You may fear that you will never get pregnant. You may find people say things that are unintentionally hurtful.

Be sure to communicate honestly with your partner and other supportive people in your life. Be sure to take care of yourself emotionally too. Some things that you can do to take care of yourself are:

- *Prepare yourself for questions by practising ways to respond.*
- *Connect with other people who are experiencing the same difficulties. For information about support groups and counsellors specializing in infertility, visit the website of the Infertility Awareness Association of Canada at: www.iaac.ca*



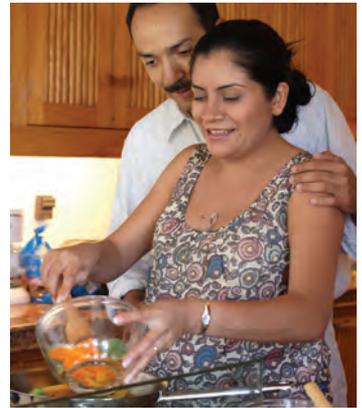


During Pregnancy

All women need to take special care during pregnancy to have the healthiest pregnancy and the healthiest baby possible.

What you can do to have the healthiest pregnancy possible:

- See your health care provider early and regularly throughout your pregnancy.
- Ask your health care provider about the safety of prescription, over-the-counter medication or herbal products. For more information visit Motherisk at www.motherisk.org or OTIS at www.otispregnancy.org
- Attend a prenatal education course.
- Make healthy food choices. For more information see “Healthy Eating for a Healthy Baby” brochure at: www.beststart.org
- Exercise regularly. For more information about exercising during pregnancy call the Exercise and Pregnancy Helpline run by the Women’s College Hospital at 1-866-937-7678 or visit www.womenscolleghospital.ca
- Avoid tobacco smoke. For information on quitting during pregnancy, see www.pregnets.org
- Do not drink any amount of alcohol. For more information see “Be Safe: Have an Alcohol Free Pregnancy” brochure at: www.beststart.org
- Learn what you can do to prevent preterm birth and low birth weight by reading the brochure “Preterm Labour Signs and Symptoms” at www.beststart.org



Prenatal Care

Most women age 35 and older will have a healthy pregnancy and a healthy baby. However, there are some conditions that you are more likely to experience if you are pregnant at age 35 or older, especially if you are having a first pregnancy. Some of these are:

- **A multiple birth.** A pregnancy with twins, triplets or more babies occurs more frequently to women over age 35, especially if the pregnancy was conceived with the help of fertility treatments. For information about multiple births visit Multiple Births Canada at: www.multiplebirthscanada.org
- **A baby with a chromosome difference.** The chance of having a baby that has a chromosome difference such as Down syndrome is higher for women who are age 35 or older.
- **Pregnancy loss.** The risk of fetal loss through miscarriage, ectopic pregnancy or stillbirth is higher for women over age 35.
- **Gestational diabetes.** For some women, pregnancy hormones can affect the way their bodies use insulin and the result is a type of diabetes called gestational diabetes.
- **Hypertension.** Hypertension, also called high blood pressure, can reduce the blood supply to the placenta.
- **Preterm birth.** A birth that occurs before 37 completed weeks of pregnancy is considered to be preterm. Babies that are born too soon or too small are more likely to have health problems.

Just like all women in prenatal care, your health care provider will monitor you for these conditions during your regular prenatal appointments. Your health care provider will talk to you about your risk for having a baby with a chromosome difference or a physical concern. You will be offered prenatal screening.

It is important to watch for signs of problems during pregnancy.

Talk to your health care provider about changes in the way that you feel.





Important Signs to Watch for if You are Pregnant

- *Strong cramps or stomach pains that don't go away*
- *Bleeding, 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 a change in their strength or number*
- *An increase in the amount of vaginal discharge*
- *Fever, chills, dizziness, vomiting or a bad headache*
- *Blurry vision or spots before your eyes*
- *Sudden or severe swelling of your feet, hands or face*
- *A significant change in your baby's movement*

Go to the Hospital right away and contact your Health Care Provider if you have any of these symptoms!

Prenatal Screening

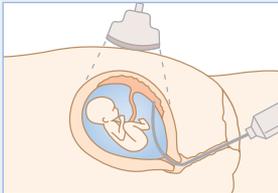
Prenatal screening shows if there is an increased chance for your baby to have certain chromosome differences such as Down syndrome or a neural tube defect (a problem with the brain or spinal cord).

You can choose whether or not to have prenatal screening. When making a decision about whether or not to have prenatal screening, consider how the information from prenatal screening will influence you and your partner's feelings about the pregnancy.

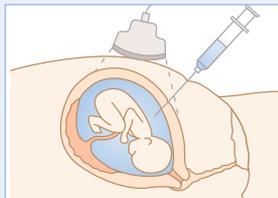
Ask your health care provider about prenatal screening options and what they indicate.

In Ontario there are several prenatal screening options. Some are completed earlier in pregnancy than others. Prenatal screening uses a sample of the mother's blood and may include an ultrasound of the region behind the baby's neck. Prenatal screening is not 100% accurate. It does not identify the risk for all possible fetal conditions.

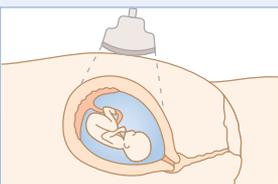
If Your Prenatal Screen is Positive...



Chorionic Villus sampling



Amniocentesis



Ultrasound

A positive result from prenatal screening indicates that your baby may have a chromosome difference or a neural tube defect. If you have a positive result you may feel some anxiety. However, remember that that prenatal screening only indicates an increased chance for concern and cannot tell you for sure if the baby does have a specific condition. Most pregnant women who screen positive will actually have a healthy baby.

After a positive screen, your health care provider may suggest that you meet with a Genetics Counsellor to discuss your options. Some women choose to have a diagnostic test such as an amniocentesis or chorionic villus sampling. These diagnostic tests will test some of the cells from the amniotic fluid or placenta and can tell for sure whether or not your developing baby does have a chromosome difference such as Down syndrome. However, these diagnostic tests do not detect all possible fetal conditions. For more information about prenatal screening and prenatal diagnostic tests in Ontario, visit the website for the Fetal Alert Network at: www.fetalalertnetwork.com.

Taking Care of Yourself Emotionally

Women who are planning a pregnancy, are pregnant or parenting after the age of 35 may have some concerns. You may be worried about conceiving, about losing the pregnancy or about the health of your baby. Be sure to tell your health care provider how you are feeling and share any of your concerns.

Discuss your concerns with a supportive partner, friend or family member. Choose those people who care about you, will listen to your feelings, will be available when you need them, and will offer you a helping hand. You may want to ask your health care provider about support services available in your community or visit www.cmha.ca.



If you Experience a Pregnancy Loss...

A pregnancy loss through miscarriage, ectopic pregnancy or stillbirth can be difficult, especially if you tried to conceive for many months before becoming pregnant. Women and their partners may grieve a fetal loss in different ways. Some people take longer to resolve their grief than others.

Some things you can do to take care of yourself emotionally are:

- Allow time to grieve. Even if you choose to try to conceive again right away, it is important to acknowledge your loss and your feelings and to take effective steps to heal.
- Allow your partner to grieve in his or her own way.
- Find additional support through a support group.

Preparing to Become a Parent

Becoming a parent is one of the greatest adjustments you will ever make. No one can adequately prepare you for the experience of being a parent - the many joys and pleasures, the fatigue and the moments of feeling overwhelmed. Most first-time parents feel happy and satisfied caring for their new baby. They also feel that their expectations of parenting are not the same as the reality.

During pregnancy you can start preparing yourself for your new role as a parent. Ask a public health nurse about local services. To locate a public health unit near you, visit the Public Health Units website of Ontario at: www.health.gov.on.ca



- **Attend a prenatal class.** This will help prepare you and your partner for what to expect during pregnancy and delivery. You will also learn how to care for your baby. Your local public health unit may offer prenatal classes or may be able to direct you to an agency that does.
- **Arrange for support.** All parents need a helping hand at times, especially after a new baby arrives. Support is especially important in the early days as you may find that you are more fatigued than usual. Supportive friends, family or hired help such as a postpartum doula can assist with the baby, meals or household chores and give you time to take care of yourself.
- **Plan for social interaction.** Being home with a new baby may feel isolating, especially if you are accustomed to daily social interaction in the workplace. Many communities offer programs for mothers and babies such as fitness activities, playgroups or early learning programs. To locate a Early Years Centre near you, visit: www.ontarioearlyyears.ca
- **Learn about parenting.** New babies don't come with instructions. As your baby moves through new stages, it can be helpful to connect with other parents and to learn from parenting groups and books.



How to Find Reliable Information about Pregnancy and Parenting

Many women aged 35 and older do a lot of reading to learn how to be as healthy as possible in pregnancy and to improve their parenting skills. There is a lot of information available, and some of it is conflicting. This can be frustrating and confusing when you want to give your baby a good start in life.

For reliable sources of health information about pregnancy visit:

- Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada (SOGC) at: www.sogc.org
- Health Canada's Healthy Pregnancy website at: www.healthypregnancy.gc.ca

For information about drug, alcohol, prescription drugs and environmental exposures during pregnancy visit:

- Motherisk at: www.motherisk.org or call 1-416-813-6780
- OTIS: www.otispregnancy.org/otis_fact_sheets.asp

For reliable information about caring for your child visit:

- Canadian Paediatric Society at: www.caringforkids.cps.ca

Parenting an infant can be a wonderful time but it also is a time of great adjustment for women, men and families. About 1 in 5 women may experience anxiety and/or depression that may be a postpartum mood disorder. Talk to your health care provider if you experience a change in your mood or behaviour, if you are having unusual thoughts or feelings, if you are worrying a lot, or if you have unexplained aches or pains. For more information visit www.lifewithnewbaby.ca



For more information talk to:

- Your Health Care Provider
- Your local Public Health Unit –
1-866-532-3161 or www.health.gov.on.ca
- Your local Early Years Centre –
1-866-821-7770 or www.ontarioearlyyears.ca
- Or visit the Canadian Mental Health Association at www.cmha.ca



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beststart@healthnexus.ca • www.beststart.org



*This Best Start Resource Centre booklet was developed in collaboration with the Halton Region Health Department.
This document has been prepared with funds provided by the Government of Ontario.
The information herein reflects the views of the authors and is not officially endorsed by the Government of Ontario.*