

Prenatal Care

Prenatal care is the health care you get while pregnant. Schedule a prenatal visit as soon as you think that you are pregnant. These visits help you have a healthy pregnancy and can help find problems before they become serious for you or your baby. Your doctor will want to see you about every 4 weeks for the first 6 months of pregnancy. You will need to see your doctor more often during the last three months of pregnancy.

This is a guide. If you have problems, the doctor may want to see you more often or do more tests.

What to Expect at Your Prenatal Visits

Your First Visit

Your first visit will be your longest visit. During this visit:

- Your height, weight and blood pressure are checked.
- Your blood is drawn to check for diseases and low iron levels.
- You will need to give a urine sample to check for infection, sugar and protein.
- You will be given a due date, an estimate of the day your baby will be born.
- You will be asked questions about you, your partner, family members, and medicines and herbs you are taking.
- Your doctor will do a physical exam including a pelvic exam with pap smear.
- The doctor will tell you to start taking a prenatal vitamin with folic acid.
- Make an appointment for your next visit.

At All Prenatal Visits

- Your blood pressure, weight, urine and general health are checked.
- Your baby's heart rate and growth are checked.
- Other tests such as a blood test or an ultrasound may be done.
- Ask questions and share any concerns about yourself and your baby.

Tests

There are routine tests that are suggested for all women to monitor the health of you and your baby. Talk to your healthcare provider if you have any questions or concerns. Common tests include:

- **Blood tests check for:**
 - Blood type
 - A protein called Rh factor. This blood test checks to see if you are Rh positive or negative.

- Iron level
- Hepatitis B
- Antibodies to show you are immune to German measles (rubella)
- Antibodies to show you are immune to chickenpox (varicella)
- Cystic fibrosis
- Sickle cell anemia
- Syphilis
- HIV. Mothers can pass this infection to their babies during pregnancy, labor and breastfeeding. All pregnant women are encouraged to get this blood test. You may be asked to sign a consent form before the test. Test results are confidential.
- Some types of birth defects in your baby. This test is called a quad screen and is a group of blood tests that check for increased risk of some types of birth defects in your baby. This test includes an alpha fetoprotein (AFP) test. The quad screen is done between 15 and 20 weeks of pregnancy.
- **One-Hour Glucose Challenge or Glucose Screening** This test measures your body's response to glucose (sugar) to check for gestational diabetes. It is done for all pregnant women between 24 to 28 weeks of pregnancy. However, if you have certain risk factors your doctor may have you take the test earlier. To complete the test, you must drink a special soda that has a large amount of sugar. Then you will have your blood drawn in exactly one hour. If your test results are not normal, you may need a second test, a 3-hour glucose tolerance test (GTT).
- **Amniocentesis** - This test checks for genetic diseases and is often done between 15 and 20 weeks of pregnancy. The doctor puts a needle through the woman's abdomen to remove a small amount of amniotic fluid. The fluid is sent to a lab for testing.
- **Chorionic Villus Sampling (CVS)** - This test is an alternative to the amniocentesis test. A sample of cells is removed from the placenta to check for genetic diseases. This test can be done earlier in pregnancy (at 10 to 12 weeks), but the risks of this test are higher.
- **Group B Streptococcus (GBS)** - GBS is a common bacteria found in the vaginas of women. It can cause infection in the baby. This test involves swabbing the vagina and rectum, usually between 35 and 37 weeks of pregnancy.
- **Tests to monitor fetal health:**
 - Fetal Movement Count – This test is done at home. You lie on your side and count how long it takes your baby to have 10 movements.
 - Ultrasound – You will have at least 1 ultrasound during your pregnancy, often at 18 to 20 weeks of pregnancy. Your doctor may want to do more ultrasounds to check your baby's growth or condition.
 - Doppler Ultrasound – This test is done to check blood flow to the baby.
 - Non-Stress Test – This test measures the baby's heart rate in response to his or her movements. This test is painless and involves putting patches on the mother's abdomen.

- Biophysical Profile – This test involves monitoring the baby’s heart rate as well as doing an ultrasound.
- Modified Biophysical Profile – This test involves monitoring the baby’s heart rate as well as doing an ultrasound. Amniotic fluid is also checked.
- Contraction Stress Test – This test measures the baby’s heart rate when the uterus contracts.

At anytime during your pregnancy, call your doctor right away if:

- Your membranes or bag of water break or leak.
- You have any vaginal bleeding.
- You have cramping or contractions that occur more than 4 to 6 times in an hour.
- You notice a decrease in your baby’s movement
- You have a headache that won’t go away.
- You have vision changes, such as blurred, tunnel or double vision.