

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 every 4-6 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** 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 be asked if you want to test for HIV.
 - 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**
You may have the following tests:
 - **Blood tests** to check for:
 - Blood type

- Iron level
- Syphilis
- Hepatitis B
- Rubella
- Alpha-fetoprotein (AFP) test—This test checks for an increased risk of some types of birth defects in your baby. It is done between 15 to 20 weeks of pregnancy. If the test result is high, more testing will be done.
- Rh factor test—This test checks to see if you are Rh positive or negative.
- HIV—All women should consider getting a blood test to check for HIV. Mothers can pass this infection to their babies during pregnancy, labor and breastfeeding. Test results are confidential.
- Sickle cell anemia
- **Ultrasound**
You will have at least 1 ultrasound during your pregnancy. Your doctor may want to do more ultrasounds to check your baby’s growth or condition.
- **Amniocentesis**
This test checks for genetic diseases and is often done between 15 and 18 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.
- **Glucose tolerance test (GTT)**
Between 24 and 28 weeks of pregnancy, you will be tested for high blood sugar in pregnancy, called gestational diabetes. You will be given a sweet soda to drink and then samples of your blood will be taken.
- **Non-stress test**
This test records your baby’s heart rate on a special machine. This test is painless and involves putting patches on your abdomen.

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 4-6 times in an hour.