

General Preconception Advice

When women are planning a pregnancy, there are many books, websites, and sources of information available to help women prepare for a pregnancy. These are the general tips recommended by Dr. Binford, however, the following advice may need to be modified for each patient depending on each woman's medical background and situation. These specific modifications will be addressed at your visit with Dr. Binford or her physician assistant, Susie Cobb, when discussing your specific preconception plan.

- If you have an indoor cat, you are never restricted in petting your cat, but once pregnant, you should no longer change the litter box. This is to avoid exposure to the cat's feces which could be contaminated with toxoplasmosis, a disease that can harm a fetus if the mother becomes infected.
- If you have never had chicken pox or you're not sure if you have had it, it would be helpful to do blood work to check for immunity. If women are not immune to the chicken pox virus in advance of pregnancy, it is ideal to vaccinate prior to trying for pregnancy. If you get the vaccine, you should then prevent pregnancy for one month afterward.
- If you are on hormonal birth control (such as the pill, patch, or ring), Dr. Binford recommends stopping birth control for one month and using condoms during that month before trying for pregnancy. This is because there is a slight increased risk of miscarriage in the 1st month off of hormonal birth control as your own hormones are returning to normal levels.
- It is very important to start prenatal vitamins in advance of conception if possible because the high levels of folic acid in prenatal vitamins taken in advance of conception has been proven to decrease the risk of spina bifida and preterm labor. (Spina bifida is a disease of incomplete closure of the spinal column and often leads to paralysis and sometimes more severe problems.) For decreasing the risk of preterm labor, recent studies recommend starting prenatal vitamins as much as a year before plans to conceive. Therefore, Dr. Binford recommends starting them even before stopping birth control--as soon as you can before trying for pregnancy. You may choose any over-the-counter prenatal vitamin. Once you are pregnant, Dr. Binford will often recommend prescription prenatal vitamins at that time and DHA supplements as well.
- You do not need to discontinue caffeine consumption while trying for pregnancy. In fact, pregnancy guidelines by the experts in our field state that 1 – 2 servings of caffeine per day in pregnancy are not in any way harmful to the fetus. If you drink more than 2 servings of caffeine per day before trying for pregnancy, then you should begin slowly decreasing your daily intake.
- You do not need to discontinue alcohol consumption while trying for pregnancy assuming that you are drinking about 2 servings per week on a social basis. Daily alcohol use should be curtailed, and binge drinking (several servings at one time) should be avoided while trying for pregnancy. Once you have missed your period and taken an over-the-counter pregnancy test confirming that you have conceived, you may not drink any amount of alcohol for the remainder of the pregnancy.
- If you are smoking prior to trying for pregnancy, this should be stopped. Smoking decreases fertility and increases the odds of miscarriage. You may call us to talk about medications which can help with smoking cessation.
- If you are taking any prescription medications for long-term health problems, please come in for a consultation to discuss if these medications are safe to continue once pregnant.
- If you are under 35 years old and if your menstrual cycle is normal (occurring every 4 weeks with a normal flow and little to no cramping), it is recommended that you try for conception for a full year before it is necessary to pursue testing for possible infertility. Even with normal fertility, there is only a 20% chance of conception the 1st few months of trying. Gradually the odds of conception increase and most couples are pregnant by the end of one year of trying. If your menstrual cycle length is abnormal for 3 months in a row (meaning shorter or longer than 4 weeks apart) at any time, this could indicate an ovulation problem, and you should come in to discuss testing sooner.
- If you are over 35, it is recommended that you contact our office for consultation if conception has not occurred after 6 – 9 months of trying.
- When trying for conception with a normal 4 week cycle, it is recommended that you have sex about every other day during days 10 – 20 of the cycle. (Day 1 is considered the 1st day of full flow of your period.) It is not necessary to have sex every day of the month, and in fact this could deplete the sperm count. It is certainly OK to have sex a couple of days in a row here and there, and we encourage the process of trying for pregnancy to be as relaxed, spontaneous, and as fun as possible.
- It is not necessary to track your temperature with a basal body thermometer. This is not a helpful tool anymore and typically adds a level of analysis and stress to the process of trying. Over-the-counter ovulation testing kits are much more helpful at predicting ovulation, but since they are costly and again can add analysis and stress to what should be a relaxed and fun process, this is considered not necessary in most couples. If pregnancy is not achieved at about 9 months of trying, starting ovulation testing kits may be helpful at that time.
- Once you confirm pregnancy with an over-the-counter home pregnancy test, please call our office to set up your 1st prenatal visit. This will be scheduled for about 8 weeks of pregnancy (which is 8 weeks after the 1st day of the last

period). This is the earliest time frame that we can be assured of seeing the fetus on ultrasound and confirming a normal pregnancy. If you experience any bleeding or severe cramping before that 1st scheduled appointment, please call the office and we will see you right away.