

The Pregnancy Journey



Pregnancy is a good time to focus on your physical health, mental health, and lifestyle goals to support you and your baby's health. Whether you are 6 weeks or 6 months pregnant, it's never too late to start. Visit the [Pre-pregnancy Journey](#) section of the **SWHR Journey to Motherhood: A Patient Empowerment Guide** for additional topics to consider throughout your motherhood journey.



Changes During Pregnancy

Your body will go through many changes during pregnancy. Normal changes that you can expect include:

- Mild swelling in the hands, legs, ankles, or feet
- Mild aches and pains in the back, stomach, or breasts
- Breathing: stuffy nose, shortness of breath with physical activity
- Heartburn, nausea, or vomiting
- Bathroom habits: constipation, frequent peeing, hemorrhoids
- Skin: acne, stretch marks, brown spots
- Tiredness and changes in sleep

While some changes are common, others might indicate more serious health concerns. It is important to contact your health care provider immediately if you experience:

- Severe and recurring headaches, stomach pain, chest pain, or nausea
- Shortness of breath at rest
- Changes in vision, dizziness, or fainting
- Vaginal bleeding, spotting, or unusual discharge
- Less frequent or stopped baby movement
- Fever
- Unusual rash
- Thoughts of harming yourself or your baby

These changes are also important to watch for in the months after giving birth.



1 in 7 pregnant patients experience conditions that cause high blood pressure.¹ Women can check their blood pressure daily using a simple home blood pressure monitor. If it reads **140/90 mmHg** (systolic/diastolic) or higher on 2 separate occasions, contact your health care provider.

¹ Ford ND, Cox S, Ko JY, et al. MMWR. 2022;71(17):585-591.

Prenatal Appointments

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists provides guidelines for 12-14 recommended **prenatal** appointments, lab tests, and ultrasounds during a pregnancy that is considered “low risk” for **complications**. Fewer appointments or having some via telehealth may be possible, depending on your health and personal circumstances. Discuss with your provider your reasons for wanting or needing a different appointment schedule, so that, together, you can make a plan that meets your prenatal care needs. If you have specific health concerns that are considered **high-risk**, your provider may request additional visits to keep a close eye on you and your baby’s progress.

Visit the *Pre-pregnancy Journey* section of the **SWHR Journey to Motherhood: A Patient Empowerment Guide** for more information about planning for transportation, childcare, and other support needs that may arise during pregnancy.



Questions to Ask Your Health Care Provider

Putting together a list of questions before visiting your provider may help you feel more prepared to discuss your pregnancy experience and plans. Below are some example questions you may consider asking:

APPOINTMENTS

- How often should I schedule my prenatal appointments? How long will each typically last?
- Will you be the provider I meet with every time, or will others be involved in my care?
- How can we best coordinate care between you and another specialist provider I see for my chronic health condition?
- I have been previously diagnosed with *[high blood pressure, diabetes, over-active thyroid, etc.]*. How might this affect my pregnancy?
- Who should I contact if I have questions or concerns outside of my scheduled visits?

SYMPTOMS

- I am experiencing *[joint pain, shortness of breath, swelling, etc.]*. How can I tell if this is a warning sign for something more serious?
- Are there helpful strategies I can implement at home to manage my symptoms?
- Do you have any concerns that my pregnancy might have increased risk for complications?
- My symptoms of *[nausea, difficulty sleeping, back pain, etc.]* have gotten worse since my last appointment. What should we do now?

RESOURCES

- Can you provide me with information about resources to support my pregnancy care?
- My *[friend, aunt, the internet, etc.]* gave me advice to help with *[symptom/issue]*. Can you please confirm what I should do?

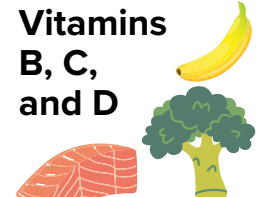
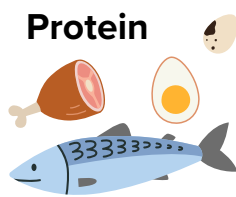
Do not be afraid to ask follow-up questions if you don’t understand your path forward. Also, consider seeking out a second opinion if you want another perspective on your **maternal health** plan and any treatment options.

A healthy diet that includes a mix of different vitamins and minerals is important for mom's health and baby's growth and development during pregnancy, as well as the long-term health for both. Pregnancy is also a critical time to avoid harmful substances and practice safe food habits to reduce health risks.

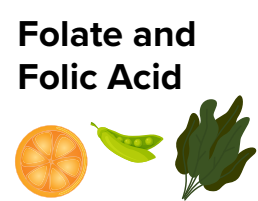
While dietary recommendations for pregnant women are not significantly different from those for women who are not pregnant, there is an increased focus on several key vitamins and minerals, many of which can be found in common food groups or **prenatal** vitamins.

Certain foods and beverages can have a higher tendency to contain bacteria or viruses that can cause illness, and women and their babies are particularly vulnerable during pregnancy. When possible, special attention should be taken when buying, storing, preparing, and eating such foods.

- The United States Preventative Services
- Taskforce recommends that all women
- planning to become pregnant or who are
- pregnant consume **400-800mcg of folic**
- **acid daily** to help prevent birth defects.
- Folic acid can be found in spinach,
- beans, peas, and lentils.



Benefits for Mom	Helps breast and uterine tissue development	Minimizes bone loss during pregnancy and lactation	Helps prevent iron deficiency anemia	Helps build a healthy immune system, absorb calcium, and produce energy
Benefits for Baby	Supports growth	Strengthens bones and teeth	Helps get oxygen to the baby	Supports healthy gums, teeth, bones, skin, and eyesight



Benefits for Mom	Supports liver function and lipid (fat) metabolism	Supports thyroid function	Reduces risk of preterm birth	Helps brain development
Benefits for Baby	Helps brain and spinal cord development	Helps brain growth and development	Helps red blood cell production	Reduces risk of birth defects

For example, pregnant women should try to avoid:

- Raw or uncooked meat and fish (e.g., rare steak, sushi, deli meat, cold cuts)
- Unpasteurized dairy products (e.g., raw milk and soft cheeses like brie, camembert, and queso fresco)
- Fish that is high in mercury (e.g., mackerel, swordfish, tilefish)
- Raw or undercooked eggs
- Unwashed fruits and vegetables
- Alcohol
- Energy drinks
- Tobacco, marijuana, and CBD products

Mercury can be toxic, affecting a baby's development in the womb. Although many fish contain some mercury, certain fish, like salmon, trout, catfish, and canned tuna have lower amounts.

Ask your **maternal health** care provider for a list of food and drinks that you should consider increasing or limiting, based on your specific health care needs. Providers may also recommend specific dietary guidelines or limitations for their pregnant patients who have an increased risk for pregnancy-related conditions like **gestational diabetes** or **preeclampsia**.

Planning for Birth and Postpartum



Where do I want to give birth—at the hospital, in a birthing center, or at home?



Who do I want to be with me during labor and delivery?



What will help me feel most comfortable during my labor and delivery?

As you move through your pregnancy journey toward birth, creating a **birth plan** can be helpful. This is a written document outlining what you would like to happen during your labor and delivery experience. Share these preferences with your provider, so that they can help you understand the benefits and risks associated with the options available to you. Together, you can work on making sound decisions and implementing your birth plan.

For women with a pre-existing health condition or **high-risk pregnancy**, it is important to coordinate care and recommendations between various health care providers throughout the pregnancy journey and postpartum. Certain specialists may be needed during labor and delivery to assist with the care of you or your baby, such as a cardiologist, anesthesiologist, hematologist, or maternal-fetal medicine specialist. Conversations with your team of providers should help you to better understand what you can expect during the birthing process, potential challenges, and how they may affect your birth plan.

Your health and safety are a priority. It is important to remain flexible in case circumstances change during your pregnancy journey.

Factors to consider when creating your **birth plan**:

- Labor positions and **induction** approaches
- Pain management coping strategies and use of medications
- Birthing props/tools (stools, yoga ball, chairs, etc.)
- Companion and family presence during labor and delivery
- Room privacy preferences
- Where newborn baby will stay (in room or nursery)
- When and how to get to the birthing facility
- Other birthing facility perks and potential limitations
- Plans to handle **complications** and emergency births
- **Lactation** and breastfeeding preferences and goals



A birth plan can allow women to share their values and choices about childbirth in advance with their providers. Planning ahead can help simplify your options and prepare you for realistic expectations.