

# You and your baby: a healthy team

Get healthy. Stay healthy.



## You are in charge

People entering parenthood want nothing more than a healthy baby. The choices you make while pregnant can help you avoid premature labor and birth. You can give your baby the best odds by:

- Eating a balanced diet.
- Avoiding smoking, alcohol and drugs.
- Watching for signs of early labor such as low, dull back pain or pelvic pressure.

## Helpful resources

Visit [choosemyplate.gov/mypyramidmoms](https://choosemyplate.gov/mypyramidmoms) for pregnancy wellness tips, recipes, and meal ideas. For more information on birth defect prevention or treatment, visit the National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities at [cdc.gov/ncbddd](https://cdc.gov/ncbddd). Or, visit the March of Dimes site at [marchofdimes.com](https://marchofdimes.com) for information on healthy pregnancy.

## Eating well for your baby

If you are pregnant, you should eat between 100 and 300 extra calories each day. Recommended weight gain while pregnant is 25 to 35 pounds. If you are pregnant with more than one baby or are underweight should gain more.<sup>1</sup> Women who are overweight or obese should gain less.<sup>1</sup> Not gaining the right amount of weight raises the chance of delivering a low birth weight baby. Gaining too much weight raises the chance of gestational diabetes and high blood pressure.

While pregnant, make every calorie count for you and your baby.<sup>2</sup> These tips can help you eat better along the way:

- Plan meals ahead of time.
- Carry healthy snacks with you such as, apples and almonds.
- Eat small meals every three hours.

Get more information and healthy snack ideas at [choosemyplate.gov/mypyramidmoms](https://choosemyplate.gov/mypyramidmoms).



## Preventing birth defects<sup>3</sup>

Not all birth defects can be avoided, but you can lower your baby's chances. Before you get pregnant:

- Have a preconception exam, especially if you have any long-term health problems.
- Make sure your shots are up to date.
- Begin taking a daily multivitamin that has 400 micrograms of folic acid.
- Get yourself to a healthy weight.
- Quit smoking.

Once you become pregnant:

- Get early and regular care before the baby is born.
- Don't change a cat's litterbox, and avoid places where cats may have defecated.
- Don't eat undercooked meat.
- Avoid touching rodents, including hamsters, mice and guinea pigs.
- Don't eat fish that contain high amounts of mercury. Examples include shark, swordfish, king mackerel or tilefish. Limit your intake of tuna, shrimp, salmon, pollock and catfish.
- Don't drink any alcohol.
- Don't take any prescription drugs, over-the-counter drugs or herbs, unless directed to do so by a health worker who knows you're pregnant.
- Avoid pesticides, and speak with your doctor about any chemicals you're exposed to at work.

## Know the signs of early labor

More than one in every 10 babies born in the U.S. are born early.<sup>4</sup> If your labor starts too soon, your doctor can give you drugs to slow or stop labor contractions, prevent infection and help your baby's lungs mature faster.<sup>5</sup> It's important to know the signs of premature labor, so you can get help and better your baby's chances.

Visit [empireblue.com](http://empireblue.com) for more ways to get healthy and stay healthy.

## Convenience should not play a role when creating a birth plan

It is important for your pregnancy to go full-term. Preterm babies are developmentally and physiologically immature. They suffer from more health problems and higher death rates than infants born full-term.<sup>7,8</sup> Also the risk of breathing problems, which are the leading reason late preterm babies are admitted to the neonatal intensive care unit, drops significantly with every week the pregnancy lasts. Increased risks are found even among babies born at 37 or 38 weeks.<sup>8</sup> Sometimes health risks to the mother or baby call for an early birth. Your doctor will weigh the risks of delivering early against the risks to your health.

## Warning signs of premature labor:<sup>6</sup>

- Stomach tightness (contractions) every 10 minutes or more often (these contractions may not be painful).
- Change in vaginal discharge (leaking fluid or bleeding).
- Pelvic pressure; feeling as though your baby is pushing down.
- Low, dull backache.
- Menstrual-type cramps or pain.
- Stomach cramps with or without diarrhea.

If you notice any signs of early labor, call your doctor right away. Your doctor may want to check you at his or her office or at the hospital. You also could be asked to stay at home and rest on your left side or drink 2-3 glasses of water or juice to see if the signs of labor stop. If they haven't stopped after an hour, call your doctor again or go to the hospital.<sup>6</sup>

### Sources

- 1 WebMD website: *Pregnancy and Weight Gain* (accessed March 2014): [webmd.com](http://webmd.com).
- 2 Health Communities website: *Pregnancy and Nutrition Overview, Weight Gain During Pregnancy* (accessed March 2014): [womenshealthchannel.com](http://womenshealthchannel.com), Choose My Plate website: *Health & Nutrition Information for Pregnant & Breastfeeding Women* (accessed March 2014): [www.choosemyplate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.gov).
- 3 March of Dimes website: *Birth Defects* (accessed March 2014): [marchofdimes.com](http://marchofdimes.com).
- 4 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website: *Birthweight and Gestation* (accessed March 2014): [cdc.gov](http://cdc.gov).
- 5 March of Dimes website: *Premature Birth Prevention and Treatment: Drugs for Use in Preterm Labor* (accessed March 2014): [marchofdimes.com](http://marchofdimes.com).
- 6 March of Dimes website: *Premature Birth: Signs and Symptoms of Preterm Labor and What to Do* (accessed March 2014): [marchofdimes.com](http://marchofdimes.com).
- 7 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website: *Born a Bit Too Early: Recent Trends in Late Preterm Births* (accessed March 2014): [cdc.gov](http://cdc.gov).
- 8 National Institutes of Health website: *Delivering Babies Even a Few Weeks Early Ups Respiratory Risks* (accessed March 2014): [nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus](http://nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus).

