

# medical conditions & genetic counseling

## Medical conditions

To stay in good health, be sure you carefully follow the treatment prescribed by your doctor or other health care provider for any chronic health problems. This is most important during pregnancy, when many medical conditions pose a special danger to women. Also, the state of your health when you conceive could affect your baby's health.

Here are some of the conditions that could affect pregnancy:

- High blood pressure
- Diabetes
- Pulmonary (lung) hypertension
- Seizure disorders (epilepsy)
- Heart and blood vessel (cardiovascular) disease, including blood clots
- Lupus
- Eating disorders
- Metabolic disorders such as phenylketonuria (PKU)

Controlling and/or treating these conditions before pregnancy may decrease health risks to mothers and infants.

## Genetic counseling

Some conditions that can harm the fetus are passed on from a parent's genes. To understand your risk, talk with your doctor about any health problems that run in your family before you become pregnant. Do this even if you aren't planning to get pregnant. Your doctor may suggest that you and your partner talk with a genetic counselor. This is someone with special training who can explain your risk of having a baby with a birth defect or a genetic disease. Genetic counseling prior to pregnancy may be especially helpful for:

- Women who have had repeated miscarriages
- Couples who have children or relatives with birth defects or mental retardation
- Descendants of Eastern European Jews and French Canadians, whose children are at risk for Tay-Sachs disease
- Descendants of individuals from the Mediterranean, Southeast Asia, India, Pakistan or Africa, whose children are at risk for thalassemia
- Descendants of individuals from Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America, whose children are at risk of sickle cell disease.
- Couples with cystic fibrosis or muscular dystrophy in the family
- Women who may become pregnant after age 34.

## keep in mind...

- If you have a medical condition that is not under control, wait until you and your doctor agree that a pregnancy would be safe.
- Talk with your provider about health problems that run in you family before you become pregnant.
- To find more information about genetic services and genetic counseling visit [www.migeneticsconnection.org](http://www.migeneticsconnection.org).

You may be surprised to learn that more than 50 percent of all pregnancies in the United States are not planned. It may also be news that many birth defects and other newborn health problems occur in the first few weeks after conception—when you may not even know you're pregnant.

A baby's health is strongly linked to the mother's health before pregnancy. That's another important reason for you to stay healthy. Whether or not you're planning to get pregnant, it's important to follow these guidelines:

- Take a multi-vitamin with 400 micrograms of folic acid every day.
- Ask your doctor about your risk of diabetes.
- If you smoke, stop. Call toll free: 1-800-480-7848.
- Have a GYN exam annually.
- If you are being hurt by a partner or someone else, call a local shelter or crisis hot line. Also tell a health care worker you trust. Call toll free: 1-800-996-6228.
- Eat a variety of whole grains, fruits and vegetables every day and lower your intake of fat.
- Know your family history. To find genetic services and information visit [www.migeneticsconnection.org](http://www.migeneticsconnection.org). Call toll free: 1-866-852-1247.