




# Women's Health Matters

The Reproductive Years





Taking good care of your health is important, especially during the reproductive years — when a woman is most fertile and can have a baby.

Regular visits to your doctor and OB/GYN and making small changes to your everyday routine, nutrition, and habits are key to preventing potential health problems that can affect you before, during, and after pregnancy.

A woman can suffer several ongoing medical conditions during her reproductive years (between 15 and 44 years old). There is also the risk of exposure to certain substances that can lead to pregnancy loss, infant death, birth defects, or other problems for mothers and infants.<sup>1</sup>

Taking care of your health and **getting timely prenatal care** is the best way to care for yourself and your baby. It's never too late to start making those changes, and we can help.

Nutrition and Physical Health	1
Reproductive and Sexual Health	2
Mental Health	4
Lead Poisoning	5
Get More Information	6



# Nutrition and Physical Health

## Nutrition

Getting the right nutrients and vitamins each day is key to having a healthy body and a healthy baby. That's why watching what you eat is so important. You want to enjoy your food, but it should also be good for you and your baby!

Below is a list of vitamins and nutrients you should be getting daily and the foods you can find them in.

### DIETARY GUIDELINES — VITAMINS<sup>2</sup>

Vitamins	Sources
Vitamin A	Carrots, sweet potatoes, spinach, kale.
Vitamin C	Red and green peppers, strawberries, kiwis, green peas, tomatoes.
Vitamin D	Tuna, salmon, sardines, liver, yogurt.
Vitamin E	Almonds, peanuts, avocado and avocado oil, pumpkin, mango.
Vitamin K	Kale, spinach, chard, turnips, collard greens.
Vitamin B6	Whole grain cereals, bread, eggs, chickpeas, bananas.
Vitamin B12	Lean beef, chicken, fish.
Folate	Lemons, bananas and melons. Beans, peas, lentils.
Fiber	Brown rice, barley, oats, nuts, blueberries, carrots, beans, lentils.
Biotin	Egg yolks, mushrooms, spinach, almonds, sweet potatoes.
Choline	Eggs, beets, spinach, some rice, meat, fish.

If you can't afford all the foods you need for healthy eating, you should contact the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program for help. If you are eligible, they will provide you with food resources and information about eating right and about how to feed your newborn. To find a WIC center near you in New York State, call **800-522-5006** or go to **[fns.usda.gov/wic](https://fns.usda.gov/wic)**.

## Physical Health

Along with nutrition, daily physical activity is one of the most important things you can do to improve your health whether you're pregnant or not. Engaging in daily physical activity can help get rid of excess weight, prepare your body for pregnancy, and help prevent certain complications with pregnancy.

Increasing physical activity is easier than you think. Here are some quick tips to get you moving:

- Skip the elevator and take the stairs when you can.
- Go for a walk in the park in the morning or after dinner with your family or friends.



# Reproductive and Sexual Health

## Infertility

Not being able to get pregnant after one year of trying (or six months for women age 35 or older) is called infertility. Women who can get pregnant but are unable to stay pregnant may also be infertile.<sup>3</sup>

- Infertility can be caused by problems both in women and men.
- Risk factors of infertility in women include:
  - Excess use of alcohol (also in men)
  - Stress
  - Poor diet
  - Being overweight or underweight
  - Sexually transmitted infections or diseases (STIs/STDs), e.g., chlamydia, genital herpes, human papillomavirus (HPV), HIV/AIDS, etc.
  - Health problems that cause hormonal changes, e.g., diabetes, thyroid issues, stress, and eating disorders.

Starting **Oct. 1, 2019**, EmblemHealth will cover some drugs for infertility. Services and monitoring for the use of these drugs including office visits will also be covered. To learn more about this benefit, call Member Services at **855-283-2146**.

## Sexually Transmitted Infections or Diseases (STIs/STDs)<sup>4</sup>

Many types of STIs/STDs can affect your ability to get pregnant and can be harmful to the mother and the fetus (unborn baby). Some infections during pregnancy can cause birth defects or illnesses to the baby. STIs/STDs are preventable, and you can reduce your risk of getting infected. Keep yourself, your partner, and your baby healthy by:

- Not having multiple sexual partners at the same time.
- Using condoms and other forms of protection during sex.
- Getting vaccinations (also called immunization) to prevent some infections. Some vaccines are not safe to use during pregnancy. It is important to know which vaccines you may need and to get them before becoming pregnant.

Get tested and treated right away if you think you or your partner may have an STI/STD.

## Pregnancy

Having a healthy baby may depend on your habits before your pregnancy, and during and after giving birth.

- **Preconception care** (before you become pregnant) is important for women who may be planning to become pregnant now or in the future.
  - A baby's development can be affected even before a woman knows she is pregnant and before she begins to receive prenatal care.
  - If you are planning to become pregnant, a pre-pregnancy checkup (a visit to your doctor to learn about things that could affect your pregnancy) is recommended. During this visit, your doctor will ask about your diet, lifestyle, medical and family history, medicines, and any past pregnancies.<sup>5</sup>
  - Some risk factors to having a healthy pregnancy may include: a lack of essential vitamins (e.g., folic acid), and exposure to alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.

If you smoke, you can get help to quit: Call **866-NY-Quits (866-697-8487)**.

- **Prenatal care** (during pregnancy) can help prevent complications and provide important resources to protect your baby and ensure a healthy pregnancy.
  - **If you think you are pregnant, don't wait! On time prenatal care is very important to your health and the health of your baby.** Schedule a visit with your doctor as soon as possible. The doctor will confirm your pregnancy and help you get started with prenatal care.
  - **During your pregnancy, you can expect<sup>6</sup>**
    - Visits to your doctor's office:
      - > once a month (during weeks 4 – 28)
      - > twice a month (during weeks 28 – 36)
      - > weekly (during weeks 36 to birth)
    - Visits may be more often if you are older than 35 or have a high-risk pregnancy.
- **Postpartum care** (after the baby is born) is focused on caring for the baby, but also caring for the new mother. Taking care of your body after giving birth and while breastfeeding will help you regain your energy and strength, which means you can provide the best care for your baby.<sup>7</sup> Your postpartum care is important, and we want to make sure you have the support you and your baby need.

- We encourage you to build a postpartum care team before you give birth. This is the team of people that will support you and your baby during your first few months together. Your team may consist of:
  - > Family and friends
  - > Your OB/GYN doctor
  - > Your baby’s primary care doctor
  - > Other health professionals — to help monitor other medical conditions.
- During the postpartum period, women appear to be at much higher risk of suffering from emotional instability than at any other time in their lives. **The “Baby Blues,”** the mildest form of postpartum mood change, can occur in up to 80% of new mothers. These mood changes appear within three to four days after childbirth, are frequently short-lived, and generally disappear within 10 days after birth.
- **Speak up!** No question or concern is too small — if you have feelings of sadness for more than two weeks, you may have **postpartum depression**. You can talk to your doctor or another trusted medical professional, so you can give your baby the attention he or she needs to be healthy.



## Mental Health

Taking care of your mental health is as important as caring for your physical health. One of the most common signs of issues with mental health is depression.

- **Depression** is a serious mood disorder that can affect how you think and feel. It can also affect daily activities such as eating, sleeping, and spending time with loved ones.
- **Symptoms** are different for everyone, but the most common signs are:
  - Regularly feeling sad, hopeless, or empty.
  - Eating and sleeping more or less than usual.
  - Losing interest in things you normally enjoy, and in family and friends.
  - Feelings of extreme sadness, anxiety, and exhaustion because of **postpartum “baby blues.”**

Talk to your doctor if you think you might be experiencing symptoms of depression that last more than two weeks.





# Lead Poisoning<sup>8</sup>

Protecting yourself from lead poisoning also means protecting your baby — now and in the future.

- **Protect yourself and your baby from lead poisoning**

- Lead is often found in lead paint (from homes built before 1978), some types of foreign medicines, spices, and cosmetics. It can also be found in some pottery, clay, and dust from construction work.
- If lead gets into your body, it can harm you and your baby. Even the smallest amount of lead is dangerous.
- Lead can cause problems with your baby's growth, behavior, and ability to learn and play normally.
- Children should be tested for lead at 1 year old (between 9-18 months) and 2 years old (between 18-36 months).

- **What can you do to prevent lead poisoning?**

- **Monitor your nutrition** — eating healthy foods rich in iron, calcium, and vitamin C can keep your body from absorbing lead. Milk, cheese, sardines, and kale are good sources of calcium.
- **Take precautions at work** — working certain jobs (or being in contact with someone who does) such as plumbing, welding, and building restoration may expose you to dust and debris that has lead. Wearing a dust mask and washing work clothes separate from the rest of your family's clothes can help reduce exposure.
- **Ask your doctor about a lead test** if you have concerns or feel like you may have been exposed to lead.
- **To get more information** about protection and lead-safe practices, call your local health department at **800-424-LEAD (5323)** or go to [epa.gov/lead/nlic.htm](http://epa.gov/lead/nlic.htm).



## Get More Information

There is a lot to learn about how your health can impact pregnancy, delivery, and caring for your baby after birth. **Contact Member Services at 855-283-2146 (TTY: 711), Monday through Friday, 8 am to 6 pm, or visit our website at [emblemhealth.com](http://emblemhealth.com).** You can also access these additional resources for support:

### CONTACT INFORMATION

EmblemHealth Healthy Beginnings Pregnancy Program: **888-447-0337**

EMBLEM BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES PROGRAM

Beacon Health Options: **888-447-2526 (TTY: 711)**

University Behavioral Associates (UBA): **800-401-4822** (*for ID cards with Montefiore logo*)

Quit Smoking: **866-NY-QUITS (866-697-8487)**

### ADDITIONAL WEB RESOURCES

#### WOMEN'S HEALTH

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services

**[womenshealth.gov](http://womenshealth.gov)**

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG): **[acog.org](http://acog.org)**

#### FOOD AND NUTRITION

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Agriculture

Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion

*2015 – 2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 8th Edition*

**[health.gov/dietaryguidelines/2015/](http://health.gov/dietaryguidelines/2015/)**

#### LEAD POISONING

**[epa.gov/lead/nlic.htm](http://epa.gov/lead/nlic.htm).**

**[health.ny.gov/environmental/lead/](http://health.ny.gov/environmental/lead/)**

**[cdc.gov/nceh/lead/default.htm](http://cdc.gov/nceh/lead/default.htm)**

## Sources

1. CDC. Recommendations to Improving Preconception Health and Health Care – United States. MMWR 2006; 55(No RR-06):1-23.
2. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Agriculture. 2015 – 2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. 8th Edition. December 2015.
3. Infertility. U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. Office of Women’s Health. <https://www.womenshealth.gov/a-z-topics/infertility>
4. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. Good Health Before Pregnancy: Pre-pregnancy Care. <https://www.acog.org/Patients/FAQs/Good-Health-Before-Pregnancy-Prepregnancy-Care#what>
5. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. Good Health Before Pregnancy: Pre-pregnancy Care. <https://www.acog.org/Patients/FAQs/Good-Health-Before-Pregnancy-Prepregnancy-Care#what>
6. Prenatal Care. U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. Office of Women’s Health. <https://www.womenshealth.gov/a-z-topics/prenatal-care>
7. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. Your Postpartum Care Team. <https://www.acog.org/Patients/FAQs/Your-Postpartum-Care-Infographic>
8. New York State Department of Health. Learn How to Protect Yourself and Your Baby from Lead Poisoning – Brochure. 2019.

