

What happens at prenatal care appointments?

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Prenatal services include tests and physical exams to make sure you and your pregnancy are healthy. It's a good time to ask questions about your pregnancy and the birth of your future baby.

What happens during my first prenatal care appointment?

Your first prenatal care visit is usually the longest one. You'll talk with your doctor about your medical history, including vaccinations and previous pregnancies, as well as any experiences you've had that may impact the health of your pregnancy – such as sexual trauma or traumatic engagement with the health care system. Your doctor will also ask you about the other parent's medical history, and both of your families' medical histories.

Your doctor will give you a complete check-up, usually with a physical exam and blood and urine tests to make sure you're healthy. This can include:

- measuring your height, weight, blood pressure, breathing, and pulse
- a [breast exam \(/learn/cancer/breast-cancer/what-breast-exam\)](/learn/cancer/breast-cancer/what-breast-exam)
- a [pelvic exam \(/learn/health-and-wellness/wellness-visit/what-pelvic-exam\)](/learn/health-and-wellness/wellness-visit/what-pelvic-exam)
- a [Pap test \(/learn/cancer/cervical-cancer/whats-pap-test\)](/learn/cancer/cervical-cancer/whats-pap-test)
- testing for [sexually transmitted infections \(/learn/stds-hiv-safer-sex\)](/learn/stds-hiv-safer-sex) (like chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis, and HIV)
- screening for diabetes, anemia, hepatitis B, hepatitis C, and rubella

Your doctor might also talk with you about [your diet and lifestyle \(/learn/pregnancy/pre-pregnancy-health\)](/learn/pregnancy/pre-pregnancy-health), and [prenatal vitamins \(/learn/pregnancy/pre-pregnancy-health/what-are-prenatal-vitamins\)](/learn/pregnancy/pre-pregnancy-health/what-are-prenatal-vitamins). The most important vitamin you can take is folic acid, which ideally you would start taking before you're even pregnant. Your doctor can give you advice about any changes you can make to have the healthiest pregnancy possible.

Some types of medicine are dangerous to use during your pregnancy. Tell your doctor about every medicine, supplement, or drug you're using, and always check with your doctor before starting any new ones.

What will happen during my follow-up prenatal care appointments?

During your follow-up prenatal care visits, your doctor, nurse, or midwife will examine you to make sure your pregnancy is developing well, and that you and the fetus are healthy.

During prenatal care visits, your doctor, nurse, or midwife may:

- update your medical history
- check your urine
- check your weight and blood pressure
- check for swelling
- feel your belly to check the position of your fetus
- measure the growth of your belly
- listen to the fetal heartbeat
- give you any genetic testing you decide to do
- administer the Tetanus, Diphtheria, and Pertussis (Tdap) vaccines
- recommend other vaccines, such as those for Covid-19, the flu, and hepatitis A if you're at risk

These prenatal checkups are a great time to talk about any questions or concerns that have come up since your last visit.

What changes to my body can I expect during my pregnancy?

There's no getting around it – your body will change a lot during your pregnancy. You'll go through lots of hormonal changes, and you'll get bigger as the fetus develops. Your uterus will grow up to 18 times its normal size, and your breasts and nipples will probably get larger, too.

It's normal to gain up to 35 pounds during your pregnancy, and some people may gain more. Your sex drive can increase or decrease throughout your pregnancy. And some people notice changes in the texture and amount of their body hair.

Unfortunately, almost everyone feels uncomfortable at some point in their pregnancy. Some common issues include:

- nausea or vomiting, especially in the morning
- swollen and tender breasts
- heartburn
- constipation
- aches and pains in your lower back and hips
- tiredness and fatigue
- trouble sleeping

There are things you can do to feel more comfortable, like changing your diet, and doing certain exercises. Your doctor, nurse, or midwife will have tips for feeling better during your pregnancy.

How do I relieve common pregnancy discomforts?

For nausea and vomiting:

- Eat a few bites of food before getting out of bed.
- Drink ginger or peppermint tea.
- Eat small meals throughout the day, instead of a few big ones.
- Drink fluids between meals instead of with your meals.
- Avoid strong spices, strong odors, and greasy foods.

For heartburn:

- Eat small meals throughout the day, instead of a few big ones.
- Chew your food slowly.

- Don't lie down for at least 1 hour after you eat.
- Wear clothes that are loose around your waist.
- Raise your head with pillows when you sleep.

For constipation

- Eat food with lots of fiber (like fruits, vegetables, and whole grain breads and cereals).
- Drink more fluids.
- Exercise.

Talk with your doctor, nurse, or midwife about getting help for pain or discomfort that doesn't go away.

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