

First steps in pregnancy

This leaflet explains more about what to do now that you are pregnant, and contains general advice for the first few weeks of your pregnancy. If you have any further questions, please speak to a doctor or midwife caring for you.

What do I need to do next?

If you would like us to care for you when you are having your baby, you can choose to do this by emailing us a referral form from www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/our-services/maternity. Just download, complete and save this form, and attach it on an email to gst-tr.GSTTmaternityreferrals@nhs.net

For the best care for you and your baby, we encourage you to self-refer as soon as possible so that you can see a midwife and have your early screening tests. You have the right to request to have your antenatal care, your delivery, or both, with us. Please contact the antenatal booking team for more information, or if you need help with completing the form (details at the end of this leaflet).

You may want to tell your family and friends immediately that you're pregnant, or wait a while until you have sorted out how you feel. Many women wait until they have had their 12-week ultrasound scan before they tell people that they're pregnant. This is due to the higher chance of miscarriage in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy. Sadly, one in five pregnancies ends in miscarriage.

If you are unsure whether you wish to continue with your pregnancy, you should talk to your GP or contact your local Sexual and Reproductive Health Clinic. Helplines are listed at the end of this leaflet. The staff you talk to will respect your decision, whatever it might be.

When is my first appointment?

Your first appointment will be with your midwife. This is called the **booking appointment** and ideally this should take place before 12 weeks, either at your local hospital or at a local health clinic. At this appointment the midwife will ask you about your medical history, previous pregnancies, take blood samples, give you lots of advice for the pregnancy and plan your care throughout the pregnancy. You should also be given information about taking folic acid and vitamin D supplements, food hygiene and aspects of your life that may affect your or your baby's health (such as smoking, recreational drug use and alcohol consumption). This is a good time to discuss any concerns or worries you may have. The appointment will probably last about an hour. You can bring your partner or a friend with you if you want to.

You will also be offered an ultrasound scan between **11 weeks, two days** and **14 weeks and one day** into your pregnancy. This is called a **nuchal scan** and will estimate when your baby is due and check the physical development of your baby. At this scan you will also be offered screening for Down's syndrome. The test combines information from the scan of the baby and a blood test from the mother. You can choose whether you wish to have this screening or not. Your midwife or GP will discuss the test with you to help you decide if you want to have it.

How will I feel during my pregnancy?

Every pregnancy is different and you may experience all, some or none of these signs.

- **Feeling very tired** – It is common to feel tired, or even exhausted, during pregnancy, especially during the first 12 weeks or so.
- **Nausea (feeling sick) and vomiting (being sick)** – You may feel and/or be sick. If you are being sick all the time and can't keep anything down, contact your GP or the Early Pregnancy and Acute Gynaecology Unit (EPAGU) (details at the end of the leaflet). You can also ask your nurse for the **Nausea and vomiting in pregnancy** leaflet.
- **Changes in your breasts** – Your breasts may become larger and feel tender, just as they might do before your period. The veins may be more visible, and the nipples may darken and stand out.
- **Passing urine more often** – You may feel the need to pass urine more often than usual, including during the night.
- **Increased vaginal discharge** – Please see your GP if you have any vaginal soreness or irritation, or if the discharge has an offensive or bad smell, as you may have a vaginal infection or thrush.
- **Constipation** is a common problem during pregnancy. Make sure you are drinking enough water and that your diet contains enough fibre. You can eat high fibre foods such as fruit, vegetables and whole-grain cereals and breads. If this does not help, see your GP for further advice. When you are pregnant you do not need to drink more than a non-pregnant person, but you need to make sure you are drinking enough water. You should drink about 1.2 litres of clear fluids (water or well-diluted squash) every day. This works out to be about six 200ml or eight 150ml glasses.
- **Having a more sensitive sense of smell than usual**, for example, to the smell of food or cooking.
- **Losing interest in certain foods or drinks that you previously enjoyed**, such as tea, coffee or fatty food. You may also start to crave certain foods due to the hormonal changes.

What do I do if I am having pain or bleeding?

If you are worried because you are having stomach pains or bleeding in pregnancy you can talk to your GP or contact the EPAGU.

Is there anything I can do to help myself?

There are a number of things you can do to stay healthy while you are pregnant. Your midwife or doctor can tell you more about them.

Vitamins and minerals

- **Folic acid** is important for pregnancy as it can help prevent some birth defects, including spina bifida. You should ideally take **400µg (micrograms)** of folic acid every day while you are trying to get pregnant and until you are 12 weeks pregnant. If you didn't take folic acid before you became pregnant, you should start as soon as you find out that you are pregnant. You can get folic acid from your local pharmacy or supermarket or your GP may be able to prescribe it for you. You may be able to get free vitamins through the Healthy Start scheme www.healthystart.nhs.uk/
- Some couples have a higher risk of having a pregnancy affected by a neural tube defect (for example, spina bifida (see above)). This includes those who have a neural tube defect themselves, those with a family history of neural tube defects, and those taking certain epilepsy medicines. If your doctor thinks you are at high-risk then they will prescribe you a high dose of folic acid (5mg (milligrams) daily).

- **Vitamins and nutrition in pregnancy** – Eating a healthy, varied diet in pregnancy will help you to get all the vitamins and minerals you need. There are only two vitamins that are advised to be taken as a supplement. They are **folic acid** (as above) and **vitamin D**. You need vitamin D to keep your bones healthy and to provide your baby with enough vitamin D for the first few months of its life. You should take 10µg (micrograms) of vitamin D each day. You can get supplements from your local pharmacy and supermarket. Your GP may also be able to prescribe them for you.
Do not take vitamin A supplements, or any supplements containing vitamin A, as too much could harm your baby. If you are unsure about any medication you are taking, please speak to your midwife, doctor or GP immediately.

Food and drink

- **Foods to avoid** – Bacterial infections such as **listeriosis** and **salmonella** can be caught from food and can harm your unborn baby. In order to avoid becoming infected while you are pregnant it is best to
 - avoid eating mould-ripened cheese, such as camembert or brie, and blue-veined cheese. (There is no risk with hard cheeses such as cheddar, or with cottage cheese or processed cheese.)
 - only drink pasteurised or UHT milk.
 - avoid eating raw or partially cooked eggs or food that may contain them.
 - Mayonnaise bought in the supermarket is usually made using pasteurised eggs, so is safe to eat.
 - avoid eating uncooked or undercooked ready-prepared meals.
 - avoid eating uncooked or partially cooked meat, especially poultry.
 - avoid uncooked shellfish.
- **Toxoplasmosis** is an infection that you can pick up from undercooked or uncooked meat, and from the faeces of infected cats or contaminated soil or water. To avoid this, it is best to
 - wash your hands before and after handling food.
 - wash all fruit and vegetables before you eat them.
 - avoid contact with cat faeces (in cat litter or in soil).
 - wear gloves and wash hands thoroughly after gardening or handling soil.
 - ensure all food you eat is well cooked and that manufacturers' instructions for heating food are carefully followed.
- During pregnancy it is also best to avoid
 - eating liver products, such as pâté, as it contains a lot of vitamin A, which may cause problems for the development of your baby.
 - eating shark, marlin and swordfish and limit the amount of tuna you eat to no more than two tuna steaks a week, or four medium-sized cans of tuna a week. These types of fish contain high levels of mercury that can affect your baby's developing nervous system.
 - high levels of caffeine as too much increases the risk of miscarriage and can lead to a small birth-weight baby. You don't need to cut caffeine out completely, but you should not have more than 200mg a day. In one mug of instant coffee there is 100mg, one mug of tea is 75mg, and one 50g bar of milk chocolate is 25mg. Check labels to find out if food or drink contains caffeine. Some fizzy drinks (in particular, energy drinks and cola) can be high in caffeine and some medicines also contain caffeine – please check the ingredients or ask your pharmacist if you are unsure.

Other ways towards a healthy pregnancy

- **Stop smoking** – Every cigarette you smoke during your pregnancy harms your unborn baby. Smoking increases the risk of your baby being underweight or being born too early. You will reduce these risks if you can give up smoking, or at least smoke less, while you are pregnant. You can get help to stop smoking from your midwife, GP or the NHS Smoking Helpline (details at the end of this leaflet).
- **Avoid alcohol and drugs** – If you are pregnant, or planning to become pregnant, you should try to avoid alcohol completely in the first three months of pregnancy because there may be an increased risk of miscarriage. If you choose to drink, protect your baby by not drinking more than one or two units of alcohol once or twice a week, and **don't get drunk**. One unit of alcohol is half a pint of beer, a single measure (25ml) of spirit (like whisky or vodka) or **half** a standard (175ml) glass of wine.

Using illegal drugs during pregnancy (including cannabis, ecstasy, cocaine and heroin) can have a serious harmful effect on your unborn baby. However, people who regularly use drugs daily should not stop using them abruptly without first seeking medical advice. Drug withdrawal treatment can benefit you and your unborn baby by helping you to overcome your addiction. You can get help from your midwife, GP, or you can contact FRANK (details at the end of this leaflet).

- **Check your medicines** – Some medicines are safe to take during pregnancy, but others may harm your baby. You should therefore take the following precautions.
 - If you take any regular medication, talk to your doctor as soon as you know you are pregnant. Ideally you should ask them for advice before trying for a baby.
 - Always check with your doctor, pharmacist or midwife before taking any medicine during pregnancy.
 - Make sure your doctor, dentist, pharmacist, or any other healthcare professional treating you or offering advice on medicines knows that you are pregnant.
 - Use as few over-the-counter medicines as possible.
- **Maintain a healthy diet** – Eating healthily during your pregnancy will help your baby to develop and grow normally, and will keep you fit and well. It's important to eat a variety of different foods every day to get the right balance of nutrients that you and your baby need. Weight-gain varies greatly in pregnancy. Most pregnant women gain 8kg to 14kg (17.5lb to 30lb), putting most of the weight on after week 20. You can talk to your GP or midwife for more advice or visit www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby.
- **Exercise** – The more active and fit you are during pregnancy, the easier it will be for you to adapt to your changing shape and weight-gain. Keep up your normal daily physical activity or exercise for as long as you feel comfortable. Some vigorous or very demanding sports, such as contact sports or racquet games, carry extra risks such as falling or putting too much strain on your joints. You should avoid scuba diving while you are pregnant because this can cause problems in the developing baby. Your midwife will be able to advise you further about exercise.

General advice

- **Travelling** – When you travel by car you should always wear a regular three-point seatbelt above and below your bump, not across it. If you are planning to travel abroad, you should talk to your midwife or doctor, who should tell you more about flying, vaccinations and travel insurance. The risk of deep vein thrombosis (blood clots) from travelling by air may be higher while you are pregnant. If you fly, drink plenty of water and move (change position or walk around the cabin) regularly (every 30 minutes or so). You can buy a pair of support stockings (available in most local pharmacies), which will reduce leg swelling.

- **Sex** – There is no evidence that sexually activity is harmful while you are pregnant.
- **Mental health during pregnancy** – Because you may feel more vulnerable and anxious while you are pregnant and after the birth, your antenatal team should ask you about your mental health. This will give you the opportunity to talk about any concerns, and to get help if necessary. When you have your first antenatal appointment you should be asked if you have ever had problems with your mental health in the past. You should also be asked about this again following the birth of your baby. This is to allow your care team to pick up on any warning signs more quickly and to plan appropriate care for you. Talk to your GP, midwife or health visitor if you have any concerns about your mental health during or after your pregnancy.
- **Domestic abuse** – It is estimated that one in four women experience domestic abuse or domestic violence at some point in their lives. This may be physical, sexual, emotional or psychological abuse. Almost a third of this abuse starts in pregnancy, and existing abuse may get worse during pregnancy or after giving birth. Domestic abuse during pregnancy puts you and your unborn child in danger. If you are being hurt or threatened, or are feeling unsafe or afraid of your partner (ex-partner or anyone else) you can talk in confidence to your GP, midwife, doctor, health visitor or social worker. Alternatively, you can call Mozaic or the National Domestic Violence Helpline (details at the end of this leaflet). **If you are in immediate danger, call 999.**
- **Maternity benefits and leave** – If you are pregnant you may be entitled to Statutory Maternity Pay from your employer, or Maternity Allowance from the Department for Work and Pensions. You are also entitled to up to a year of maternity leave. Prescriptions and NHS dental treatment are free while you are pregnant and for 12 months after you have given birth. To claim free prescriptions, ask your doctor or midwife for **form FW8** and send it to your health authority.

You should seek advice on benefits as soon as you find out you're pregnant. Benefits have to be claimed on different forms, from different offices, depending on what you're claiming. You can get advice from your local Jobcentre Plus, Citizens Advice Bureau, library or other advice centre.

Useful sources of information

Alcoholics Anonymous

Offers support and advice if you need help with a drinking problem, or if your drinking has reached the point where it worries you.

t: 0845 769 7555 **w:** www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk

Brook

Brook has a network of centres across the UK offering free and confidential sexual health advice and contraception to young people under the age of 25.

t: 0808 802 1234 **w:** www.brook.org.uk

Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)

Helps people to resolve their legal, money and other problems by providing free, independent and confidential advice, and by influencing policymakers.

t: 08444 111 444 **w:** www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Family Planning Association Helpline – Help, advice and information for all ages on all areas of sexual health, including contraception, sexually transmitted infections, pregnancy choices, abortion and planning a pregnancy.

t: 0845 310 1334 **w:** www.fpa.org.uk

FRANK – Friendly, confidential drug advice
t: 0800 77 66 00 **w:** www.talktofrank.com

Marie Stopes

Offers support and advice for sexual healthcare services, including abortion.
t: 0845 300 80 90 **w:** www.mariestopes.org.uk

Miscarriage Association

Support and information for anyone affected by miscarriage, ectopic pregnancy or molar pregnancy.
t: 01924 200 799 **w:** www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk

Mozaic

Free, confidential and independent support, advice and information for women experiencing domestic violence – based at St Thomas' Hospital.
t: 020 7188 7710 or 020 7188 9181, Monday to Friday 9.00am to 5.00pm
e: talk@mozaic.org.uk **w:** www.mozaic.org.uk

National Childbirth Trust

Information and support on pregnancy, birth and early parenthood.
w: www.nct.org.uk

National Domestic Violence Helpline

For women experiencing domestic violence and their families, friends, colleagues and others calling on their behalf.
24-hour t: 0808 2000 247 **w:** www.nationaldomesticviolencehelpline.org.uk

National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) Antenatal Care Clinical Guideline

Information and advice about the antenatal care that you should receive throughout your pregnancy.
w: www.publications.nice.org.uk/quality-standard-for-antenatal-care-qs22

NHS Choices

Information and advice on all aspects of your pregnancy, birth and new born baby.
w: www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby

NHS Smokefree

Helping you decide on the best way to stop smoking.
t: 0800 022 4 332 (open 9am to 8pm, Monday to Friday, and 11am to 4pm at weekends)
w: www.smokefree.nhs.uk

Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists

Information and advice about your pregnancy, including leaflets on air travel during pregnancy and alcohol during pregnancy.
w: www.rcog.org.uk

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns please contact the Maternity Helpline on 020 7188 8760 (Monday to Friday, 10am to 6pm). Out of hours, please contact the Maternity Assessment Unit 020 7188 1722/1723.

Early Pregnancy and Acute Gynaecology Unit (EPAGU)

Available for help and advice if you have a problem in early pregnancy (up to 18 weeks), such as pain, bleeding or severe vomiting. Women up to 18 weeks pregnant do not need to make an appointment and can just walk in to be seen by a specialist nurse (8th floor, North Wing, St Thomas' Hospital, Westminster Bridge Road, London SE1 7EH). For advice you can contact the EPAGU on 020 7188 0864 and ask to speak to a nurse (Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 6.30pm, Saturday and Sunday, 9.30 to 3.15pm).

In an emergency attend the Emergency Department (A&E) at St Thomas' Hospital (ground floor, Lambeth wing, open 24 hours a day). If you need to speak to someone urgently **and you are less than 18 weeks' pregnant** please contact the EPAGU on 020 7188 0864.

If you need to speak to someone urgently **and you are 18 weeks' pregnant or more** please contact the Maternity Assessment Unit on 020 7188 1722/1723.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets

Pharmacy Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

t: 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

t: 020 7188 8801 (PALS) **e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk

t: 020 7188 3514 (complaints) **e:** complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk

Language and accessible support services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch.

t: 020 7188 8815 **e:** languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk

NHS 111

Offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day.

t: 111

Leaflet number: 3751/VER2

Date published: October 2017

Review date: October 2020

© 2017 Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust

A list of sources is available on request