



Nutrition & Exercise

Staying fit and taking good care of yourself **can help you feel great and stay healthy**. Good fitness includes being at a healthy weight, eating the right amounts of healthy foods, and exercising regularly. Being fit and healthy may decrease your need for physician visits, medications, or hospital stays.

If you become pregnant, **being fit and healthy can make you less likely to experience problems in pregnancy and may help to improve the health of your baby**. If you plan to get pregnant someday, remember that the choices you make today can affect your pregnancy later.

Aim for a Healthy Weight

Your weight has a big impact on your health. Being overweight or obese increases the risk of many diseases and health conditions including high blood pressure (hypertension), high cholesterol (dyslipidemia), type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and stroke.

- Know your **Body Mass Index (BMI)**. Your health care provider can help you figure out your BMI or you can figure it out yourself by going to <http://www.consumer.gov/weightloss/bmi.htm>.
- A BMI between 18.5 and 24.9 is considered healthy.
- Women who are underweight or overweight when they get pregnant are more likely to have a baby born too early.
- Overweight women are more likely to experience problems in their pregnancy and labor.
- Some women who are underweight or overweight may have trouble in getting pregnant.

Eat Healthy Foods

A big part of staying healthy is eating healthy. This includes **eating a variety of foods, especially vegetables, fruits, legumes, whole-grain, fat-free or low fat milk and milk products, and lean sources of meat**.

- Eat at least five servings of fruits and vegetables every day.
- Limit sweets, fats, salt, alcohol, and soda.
- Pay attention to serving sizes so you do not eat too much.

Folic acid is extremely important to a woman's health and is thought to lower the risk of heart disease and certain types of cancers in women. Folic acid is a vitamin found in leafy green vegetables, beans, and fortified breads and cereals.

- Folic acid is needed to make red blood cells which carry oxygen to all parts of the body.
- Folic acid can prevent defects in your baby's brain and spinal cord, if taken before and during the first few weeks of pregnancy.
- **All women should take a multivitamin with 400 micrograms of folic acid every day.**

Iron

Women who may become pregnant need to eat foods high in iron. Iron also carries oxygen in the blood. Foods high in iron include meats, fortified cereals, beans, and spinach. Iron is better used by the body when eaten with foods high in vitamin C like oranges, grapefruit, strawberries, tomatoes, green peppers, broccoli, cabbage, and cantaloupe.



NUTRITION & EXERCISE - continued

Be Active

Regular exercise can improve your health by:

- Reducing the risk of dying of heart disease (the nation's leading cause of death for women).
- Decreasing the risk for stroke, colon cancer, diabetes, and high blood pressure.
- Helping to control weight.
- Helping to build strong bones, muscles, and joints.
- Reducing falls among older adults.
- Relieving the pain of arthritis.
- Reducing symptoms of anxiety and depression.

Aim for 30 minutes of moderate physical exercise every day. Even short bursts of activity can improve your health. With a little creativity and planning, **even busy people can make room for physical activity.** Think about your schedule and look for ways to be more active.

Consider the following suggestions:

- Wear a pedometer (to measure your steps) and work towards increasing the number of steps you take every day.
- Walk, cycle, jog, skate, etc., to work, to school, the store, or to your place of worship.
- Park your car or get on or off the bus farther away from your destination.
- Take the stairs instead of the elevator or escalator.
- Take fitness breaks—walking or doing desk exercises— instead of taking cigarette or coffee breaks.
- Perform gardening or home-repair activities.
- Exercise while watching TV (for example: use hand weights, stationary bicycle/treadmill/stair climber, or stretch).

Keep in Mind

- For more information on how to be healthy before you get pregnant go to: marchofdimes.com.
- For healthy recipes go to: <http://www.fruitsandveggiesmatter.gov/>.
- For information on Healthy Start Services go to: <http://www.healthystartflorida.com/directory/directoryList.asp>.

Health Care Provider Instructions

My Next Steps

References:

NetWellness Consumer Health Information - <http://www.netwellness.org/healthtopics/pregnancy/>.
Medem: Connecting Physicians and Patients - <http://www.medem.com/index.cfm>.
<http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/physical/importance/index.htm>.
BMI Calculator - <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/bmi/index.htm>.
United States Department of Agriculture - <http://www.mypyramid.gov/>.

