Before Getting Pregnant

Having a healthy pregnancy and a healthy child doesn’t just depend on what you do while you’re pregnant but also how you prepare for your pregnancy.

Follow this checklist to get off to a great start.

- Get a checkup and discuss your medical history with your doctor. You may be predisposed to conditions that could affect your pregnancy or your ability to get pregnant.

- Find out what vaccinations to get now. There are some vaccinations that are recommended before you get pregnant and some are recommended after giving birth. Talk to your doctor about which ones to get and when.

- Begin taking a multivitamin with folic acid. Taking 400 micrograms of folic acid per day can help reduce the baby’s risk for birth defects of the brain and spinal cord called neural tube defects (NTDs). Folic acid also can be found in foods such as broccoli, peanuts, citrus fruits, and leafy vegetables, but most women don’t eat enough of these to get the recommended daily dose.

- Make healthier choices. Reach a healthy weight and make long-term dietary changes. If you’re underweight, overweight or obese, you’re at higher risk for developing serious conditions, like high blood pressure or diabetes, and your baby is at higher risk for being born premature or with birth defects.

- Stop smoking, drinking and using drugs before you start trying to get pregnant. Alcohol, tobacco use and using illegal drugs can cause birth defects, complications during pregnancy, low birth weight babies, and learning and behavioral delays for your baby. Talk to your doctor before taking any prescription or over-the-counter drugs, or dietary or herbal supplements.

- Avoid exposure to dangerous substances, including synthetic chemicals, fertilizers, bug sprays, paint thinners or other solvents. These chemicals can increase your risk for miscarriage and birth defects. Also avoid contact with rodents (including pet hamsters, mice or guinea pigs) and cat feces – they can contain viruses or parasites that can hurt your baby.

- Limit your intake of certain foods. Make sure to fully cook your meats and fish and avoid fish with high mercury content as they can be dangerous to your unborn baby. High-mercury fish include swordfish, shark, king mackerel and tilefish.