



Dignity Health®
Sequoia Hospital

Together, we plan for it all.

Your guide to pregnancy.



Pregnancy planning guide.

Bringing a child into the world is one of the most beautiful experiences you'll ever have. And one of the biggest decisions you'll ever make. In more ways than one, it is completely life-changing. And for the nine months that you carry your new bundle of joy, body-changing too.

Whether you're trying for your first child or hoping to expand your family, being pregnant comes with many questions. This guide is your resource to answer some of the most common ones by offering information for each stage of pregnancy. It's not meant to replace the advice of your personal physician but rather to provide basic tips to help you have the best experience possible.

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The Family Birth Center at Sequoia Hospital.

Preparing for pregnancy, being pregnant and having a baby are all exciting times in your life—and we're here to help. Voted by readers of Bay Area Parent magazine for more than 10 years as "Best Birth Center," the labor and delivery staff at Sequoia Hospital provides personal, expert care for mothers and babies.

We offer an onsite Level II Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) and a compassionate team that is dedicated to helping you and your family have a healthy, loving birth experience. Our NICU is staffed by doctors and nurses from Lucile Packard Children's Hospital Stanford who specialize in neonatology care.

Take a virtual tour of our facility by scanning the QR code:



Planning for pregnancy.

There are many things to consider when choosing to have a baby. Before embarking on this life-changing journey, there are steps you can take for a more successful delivery. Let's get started.

Preparing your body.



Vitamins

If you're thinking of becoming pregnant, prenatal vitamins can supplement the key nutrients that may be lacking in your diet. Folic acid helps prevent neural tube defects, and iron supports the development of the placenta and fetus. Prenatal vitamins containing calcium and vitamin D are also recommended, and ones containing vitamin C, vitamin A, vitamin E, B vitamins, zinc and iodine. Your doctor can determine the correct dosage for you and whether you need to supplement with any other nutrients, like omega-3 fatty acids.



Nutrition

Good nutrition will improve you and your baby's health. While your calorie needs do not change during the first trimester (1-12 weeks), it's important to eat various healthy foods, including fresh fruits, vegetables, low-fat dairy products, whole grains and lean proteins. During the second and third trimesters (weeks 13-40), you'll need an extra 300 calories a day for your baby. These can come from healthy snacks such as a cup of nonfat yogurt, half a cup of fruit or peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. The vitamins, minerals and nutrients needed to support your baby's growth and development come largely from eating a healthy, well-balanced diet. You should avoid high-fat foods and simple carbohydrates like sugary sodas and candy.



Exercise

Unless your doctor advises against it, regular exercise is a great way to stay in shape during pregnancy and help you prepare for labor and delivery. At least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise is recommended per day for most people. Walking, swimming, low-impact aerobics and cycling on a stationary bike are good exercises. Make sure to warm up and stretch before any physical activity and cool down afterward. Drink plenty of fluids, and avoid overheating. If it helps you stay motivated, find a partner to work out with, like a friend or family member, or join a class. The important thing for you and your baby is to get up and get moving, even for half an hour every day.

Your health care team.



Family Birth Centers

Once you've chosen to have a baby, your next big decision is where to have it. Our Family Birth Center is proudly recognized as a Blue Distinction® Center (BDC) for Maternity Care. We offer a specialized team who will be by your side every step of the way—with classes to help you prepare and the reassurance of our onsite Level II Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) staffed by doctors and nurses from Lucile Packard Children's Hospital Stanford who specialize in neonatology care.

And to help moms get off to a great start—even before they meet their new bundle of joy—our International Board-Certified Lactation Consultants can support your journey with breastfeeding.

From the moment you arrive until the moment you leave, the Family Birth Center at Sequoia Hospital will make sure your birthing experience is as warm and special as you've always hoped it would be.



Choosing an obstetrician

Few decisions are as important as choosing an obstetrician to guide you through your pregnancy and your child's birth. Take your time, ask lots of questions and make sure you find someone you trust and who makes you feel comfortable. You're going to be taking a long, life-changing journey together.

So how do you start? Referrals from your primary care doctor or friends and family members who've been through the process already are a good place to start. It's worth taking the time and asking the questions to find an obstetrician who will be a perfect partner for the physical and emotional challenges in the months ahead.



Midwife option

As you begin researching your delivery options, you may choose to go through labor and delivery with a midwife, especially if you're looking for a more natural option. Midwives are professionals who assist with childbirth and overall reproductive health, and they're medically trained health care professionals who seek to eliminate as much technology from the birthing process as possible. While they may call in an obstetrician if complications arise, they are fully qualified to deliver your baby themselves, and some are even trained as nurses.

Positively pregnant.

If you know you're pregnant, and it's what you've been trying and hoping for, congratulations! This is an exciting time and a unique, wondrous experience. Expect changes in your body, mind and soul. Expect mood swings. Expect lots of attention. Expect to feel great and not-so-great. Expect to behave differently. Maybe that's why they call it "expecting." Here are some things to expect as you go through your first trimester.

How you may be feeling.



Emotions

You may not look pregnant in your first trimester, but you'll definitely feel it. Simply put, becoming pregnant is an emotional rollercoaster, and for every high, there's a possible low.

Physically, having a baby can be a very different experience for everyone. Emotionally, there are times when everyone feels euphoric, then a little sad, giddy with joy again and then panicked and uncertain. Your hormones are changing and are in total control. You may wonder if you're ever going to feel like your old self again. During your first trimester, you may be all over the place and it's all perfectly normal.



Physical signs

While the outside world may not be able to tell you're pregnant during your first trimester, you'll undoubtedly feel the changes taking place in your body. Soon after conception, your breasts may feel tender and swollen. With or without vomiting, nausea may begin a month or so after you become pregnant.

To help lessen the severity of this morning sickness, which can occur any time of day or night, avoid having an empty stomach. You should also avoid foods high in fat, drink plenty of fluids and keep foods or drinks containing ginger on hand. These will settle your stomach.

In your first trimester, other physical changes you can expect are increased urination, fatigue, food cravings and aversions, heartburn and constipation. It's all part of the miracle of life. Not fun, but normal.

Exams and screenings.



Visits and tests in first trimester

While every pregnancy is different, and some are more complicated than others, you can expect certain routine medical exams during your first trimester. A health care professional will weigh you at these visits and check your blood pressure. They may also check your urine for bacteria, protein or sugar and your doctor may measure the height of your uterus above your pubic bone to determine the growth of your fetus. Around weeks 10 to 12, you should be able to hear the baby's heartbeat using a Doppler ultrasound.

The point of these visits, which usually occur monthly in those first 12 weeks, is for the doctor to check on your health and the baby's health. Tell them exactly how you're feeling and ask about any concerns you may have or problems you may be experiencing. Nothing is too small to discuss with your doctor, and there are no bad or silly questions.

Things to do.



Things to avoid

The first three months of pregnancy are when most miscarriages happen, and roughly 1 in 10 pregnancies end this way. Because your baby is developing quickly and there's a small chance of pregnancy loss, there are several activities and foods you should avoid. Smoking, drinking alcohol, gaining or losing too much weight and consuming too much caffeine can all impact your health and the health of your baby, so you should avoid all of these. You should also avoid eating certain foods, like raw or undercooked meat and eggs, raw sprouts and some types of seafood high in mercury, like mackerel and tilefish. You should also avoid unpasteurized dairy products, fruit juices and processed meats.

Besides foods and drinks, you should also take a pass on saunas, hot tubs, whirlpools and steam rooms. While safe during later stages of pregnancy, massages are not recommended during the first trimester. If you require acupuncture, you should only receive it from someone trained in treating pregnant women. Avoid cleaning the cat's litter box and check the labels of cleaning products for safety warnings.



Work and rest

As joyful as it is to be bringing a new life into the world, it's also exhausting and stressful. While it's okay to keep working in most cases, you should also consider making a few healthy changes.

If you were a night owl before becoming pregnant, you now need a good night's sleep with eight hours every night. Start going to bed early enough that you wake up well-rested. Drink lots of fluids, even if it means having the largest water bottle in the office. It's important to stay hydrated.

Keep crackers, cheese, nuts, dried fruit and other healthy snacks at your desk, and eat frequently to help with the queasiness. Tell your boss that you're pregnant and let your co-workers know when you're ready.

Growing and changing.

Congratulations! Your first trimester is behind you, and it's time to settle in for the remaining 28 weeks. You should sleep much better, have more energy and feel less nauseous than in the first 12 weeks. However, you'll experience a whole different set of symptoms, and somewhere between 16 and 20 weeks, you'll feel your baby's first tiny movements.

Your third trimester (27-40 weeks) is a very exciting time as your due date gets closer and closer. But it's also a time of growth in your baby and your uterus, accompanying physical symptoms.

How you may be feeling.



Emotions

While the emotional rollercoaster may not be quite so wild as it was in the first trimester, your hormones are still very much in charge. So even though the intense fatigue, morning sickness and moodiness are likely to fade, you may feel more forgetful and disorganized than before. You could also become hypersensitive about the way you look and very emotional about feeling the baby move.

The forgetfulness continues into the third trimester along with some increased anxiety, as well as excitement, about the big day. You may worry about all the changes that are about to take place as you bring a new life into the world. And you may feel more tired, uncomfortable, and naturally, irritable. Talk to your partner, your family and friends and your doctor about your emotions. It'll help you feel better and more in control.



Social and family situations

As joyful and exciting as it is having a baby, it's also a time of great stress. The life you're bringing into the world starts to become the only thing that matters. But remember, you're not alone during this time. And a supportive partner, a loving family and close friends are all vital to getting through your second and third trimesters in good emotional shape. So, while there will be times when you lose patience with those around you, even family members, when you feel no one understands what you're going through, when intimacy dwindles, when your heightened emotions place great strain on friendships, try and remember that these are people who love you and want what's best for you and your baby. They're on your side. And certainly, with your partner, you're in this together. And for the long haul.



Your changing body

Your second trimester is a little easier than your first in that the periods of intense nausea and fatigue tend to fade. Still, they're replaced by changes to your body as your baby really starts to grow and your abdomen expands accordingly. Along with a more noticeable baby bump, you may feel pain in your back, abdomen, groin or thighs. Stretch marks may appear on your belly, breasts, thighs or buttocks. You might notice a darkening of the skin around your nipples and patches of darker skin over your cheeks, forehead, nose or upper lip. You could also experience a numbing or tingling sensation in your hands, itching on your abdomen, palms and soles of your feet and swelling of the ankles, fingers and face.

The discomforts of the second trimester move into the third as the baby continues to grow and increase pressure on your internal organs. You may have to urinate more frequently and might have difficulty breathing. You could also experience shortness of breath, heartburn and difficulty sleeping. During the final 12 weeks, other physical changes include hemorrhoids, tender breasts and a protruding belly button. You'll also feel the baby "dropping" or moving lower in your abdomen. As you get close to your due date, you'll feel contractions, which may be false or the real thing!

Exams and screenings.



Schedule of visits and tests

In your second trimester you can expect to go for checkups once a month. For weeks 28 to 36, the frequency of your appointments until the big day may increase.

In terms of the actual appointments in your second trimester, certain things remain the same as the first: Your doctor will check your weight, urine and blood pressure. They'll keep track of your baby's development by measuring your abdomen, listening to the baby's heartbeat and checking whether you feel any fetal movement. They may offer tests to check for genetic or chromosomal disorders, and you'll have fetal ultrasounds where, among other things, you can choose to learn your baby's sex. The doctor will also want to test for gestational diabetes by checking your blood count and iron levels.

In your third trimester, your doctor will listen to your baby's heartbeat and ask you about contractions and whether or not you're experiencing leaking fluid or bleeding. They will also screen you for GBS, a type of strep, and your doctor will talk to you about the vaccinations that you'll need. Your doctor will carefully monitor your baby's position in these final weeks. As always, relay any concerns you may be having and ask any questions.

Things to do.



Letting people know: family, friends, work

For reasons of your own, you may initially choose to keep your pregnancy a secret. Share the good news with family, friends and work colleagues when you're comfortable. Whether you have an intimate conversation, go all out with an elaborate announcement or throw a party, you invite people along for this exciting journey. You can't ever have too much love, support and understanding as you go from the second trimester to the third and eventually to the big day.



Birth planning

A birth plan is a written set of requests that cover how you want things to be before, during and after labor and delivery. You may not want one, and some doctors may not offer one. However, a birth plan can go a long way in helping your big day go exactly how you envisioned it would. Birth plans are highly individualized because no two moms-to-be are alike, and they can be extremely detailed or just cover the basics. In general, here are a few things to consider should you choose to write one:

- What kind of labor experience do you want?
- Do you want to eat or drink, walk around, have music or aromatherapy oils or have your partner take photos?
- Do you want your membrane left intact for as long as possible or artificially ruptured?
- What type of fetal monitoring would you prefer?
- Would you like an episiotomy or natural tearing only?
- Do you want an epidural or would you prefer more natural options like acupuncture and reflexology?

When it comes to the delivery, maybe you'd like to involve your partner by having them suction or cut the umbilical cord. That can be in the birth plan, too. You can also include instructions about C-sections and requests for newborn care. If you want to hold the baby directly after birth or breastfeed immediately, you can include it in the plan.

The important thing to remember is that this is your big day, and your voice is important. Be sure to review the birth plan with your doctor to gain their input on your health and what your birth center can accommodate.



Choosing a pediatrician

Choosing a pediatrician is an important decision, as this is the doctor who will take care of your child from the time they're a baby through adolescence. Take your time and choose one who makes you feel comfortable and confident in their ability to care for your child.

Referrals from friends or family members are a good place to start. If you know and trust someone, it makes sense to consider their opinion, but be sure they like their doctor for important reasons.

For most people, the best way to find the right pediatrician is to schedule a few appointments, ask a lot of questions and see how you feel at the end of each interview. Note how well they listen to you and how thoughtfully they respond. Did they ask you any questions? Did they treat you with the respect every new parent deserves? How did they make you feel while you were talking? Overall, did it seem like a good fit for you and your family? Once you've spoken to a shortlist of candidates, you should choose the best pediatrician.

Delivery and beyond.

Congratulations on the new addition to your family! But while the past nine months are now behind you, the adventure is far from over. Your body, and your baby, have just been through an enormous physical ordeal, and while there is much excitement, this is also a delicate time. You must rest, recover, look after your little one and take care of yourself.

Caring for your baby.



Monitoring vitals

Your baby will begin to lose heat immediately after they exit the womb, so the first thing the medical team will do is dry them off and wrap them in something warm. At one and five minutes after birth, the team will use an Apgar assessment to evaluate the baby's heart rate, breathing, muscle tone, reflex response and color. The test at one minute after birth reflects how well they handled the delivery, and the test at five minutes shows how well they're doing on their own.

Caring for you.



The delivery process

Your delivery may have been easy or complicated. You may have had a vaginal birth or a C-section. You may have been in labor for a few short hours, many long hours or even days. But no matter how your delivery went, you brought a child into the world. That's a reason to celebrate and give your body time to recover. Not just a few days or even weeks. It can take a couple of months, at least, to feel like yourself again. And that's if you allow yourself to rest, eat well and relax. After delivering a baby, it's the least you deserve.



Postpartum tests

Your body goes through a great deal of stress during labor and delivery, and a postpartum checkup measures how you're recovering. You should get a complete checkup no later than 12 weeks after birth, even if you feel fine. Your doctor will test you for diabetes and high blood pressure in the exam. They will record your weight, check your breasts and abdomen and administer a pelvic exam. They will also ask you how it feels to be a new mom. Your doctor needs to know if you're overwhelmed and/or depressed. Postpartum depression is common and nothing to be ashamed about, and it's a serious medical condition that affects how you care for yourself and your baby.



Communication

Having a baby is one of life's greatest gifts, and hopefully you and your partner are equally excited for the journey ahead. But a newborn can really impact your relationship. A baby demands complete attention. Spontaneity goes out the window, along with sleep, time for yourself and maybe even time for each other. The focus, quite rightly, is on the newest member of the family. It can get frustrating and overwhelming, and your relationship can suffer. But patience and understanding can make a big difference in your new life. And communication is key. Tell your partner how you feel—physically, mentally and emotionally—and let them know what you need. Ask them how they're doing and if there's anything they need. If you prioritize caring for the baby while still being thoughtful about each other, there's no reason why your relationship can't actually grow stronger during this special time. So, talk honestly, listen carefully and try to be there for each other as much as you're both there for the baby.



Your care team

When you come home from the hospital, it's important to surround yourself with a group of people ready, willing and able to support you and your baby in those first weeks and months. Your care team should include trusted friends and family members who want what's best for you. Your obstetrician should be part of the team in case there are any health issues after delivery. And similarly, you need a pediatrician on board to handle your baby's medical needs. Your care team can also include nurses, social workers, counselors and other professionals you may need to help with things like breastfeeding and nutrition. Bringing a baby into the world is an enormous, life-changing event and you shouldn't have to go it alone. Remember, it takes a village.



Your new life together.



Baby's first days

As joyful as it is to bring your baby home from the hospital, those first few days can be quite stressful. The baby is small and helpless, and unless you already have kids, the experience is brand new. But just remember, newborns are resilient little things. And while there will be much pee and poop and crying, it's all quite normal. Just keep the baby fed and clean, don't expect too much sleep, and you'll be fine.

Whether you breastfeed or bottle feed, expect the little one to get hungry every two to three hours. Take turns with your partner so that you're able to get some sleep. And be sure to burp the baby once they're done eating to get rid of gas.

Babies pee and poop a lot, so change their diaper often to avoid rashes and other skin problems. It's also important during the first days to keep the area of the umbilical cord clean. Once the cord falls off, you can bathe the baby with mild soap and water a couple of times a week.

In terms of sleep, your little one will wake up quite often during the night. They may need a feeding or a clean diaper or both. After that, they should go back to sleep. If they keep crying, they may be in pain. Call your doctor if you're not sure what to do.



Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding is the best source of nutrition for most infants and has health benefits for you and your baby. For you, breastfeeding can help lower the risk of high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, ovarian cancer and breast cancer. For your newborn, the nutrients in breast milk can help reduce the risk of asthma, obesity, type 1 diabetes and other infant health problems. But, while you may be keen to breastfeed, it might not come naturally to you or your baby. Call your doctor or a breastfeeding counselor for help if you're having problems. And investing in a breast pump will allow your partner to do some of the nighttime feedings so that you can get a little more sleep.



Visitors

Bringing home a baby is exciting not just for you and your partner, but for your family, friends, neighbors and co-workers. Everyone will want to visit. Don't let them. At least, not until you're ready. And only on your terms. You've just been through a physically traumatic event, and no doubt you're exhausted. For the first few days, you may want to bond, alone, just you and your newly expanded family. That's fine. When you do decide to open your doors, keep visits short—maybe half an hour—and confined to one room. Neither you nor your partner need to be cleaning the whole house right now. And don't worry about looking like a million dollars. You've just had a baby! And besides, they're not coming to look at you anyway. Don't be shy about asking visitors to wear a mask and to thoroughly wash their hands if they plan on picking up the little one. Babies are prone to infections, so be strict about the health protocols you want. Consider getting people to text before they arrive so that you have no surprises. Do whatever you have to do to make visiting time happen on your schedule and in a way that doesn't add any more stress to your life. After that, soak up the oohs and aahs and other assorted compliments that are sure to come your way. You deserve them all.



Follow-up care for you and baby

During your newborn's first few weeks, it's important to see your pediatrician for routine follow-up visits. These visits check whether your baby is thriving and offer any needed treatments. You can expect your doctor to check your baby's weight and length and measure their head circumference.

They'll also perform a thorough physical exam to check for problems. They'll want to see how your baby interacts with you. They'll give any required immunizations and discuss recommended ones, but these are not mandatory. And they'll want to know about the baby's eating and sleeping habits, peeing and pooping routines, crying and other types of behavior.

For you, follow-up visits with your OBGYN should check for signs of postpartum depression as well as issues around diabetes, hypertension, thyroid conditions, breastfeeding, continence, medication usage and many other concerns, including conditions specific to you.

Whether the follow-up visit is for you or your little one, remember: There are no bad, wrong or silly questions. There are just questions. And, if you have any concerns about either of you, ask them. Your doctor is there to help.

The Family Birth Center at Sequoia Hospital.

Helping you plan for every incredible moment.

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