

# Introduction

Congratulations on your pregnancy! You may have been planning your pregnancy for a long time, or perhaps you've unexpectedly found yourself pregnant. Either way, you're likely to have lots of questions.

This book gives you information about how to look after yourself and your baby in pregnancy and the busy weeks after the birth. It's about what to expect in labour and birth and how to make informed decisions about your care.

The book is also about your emotional wellbeing – this is part of a healthy pregnancy too. Like any big change in your life, having a baby can bring some anxiety and uncertainty. That's why *Having a baby* covers some of the concerns you may have in pregnancy and early parenthood and how to get help if you need it.

Along with good health care, support from people close to you can also help you through pregnancy, birth and life with your new baby. Share this book around so your partner, family and friends can learn more about pregnancy, how it affects you and what they can do to help.

As you read through this book, you'll find out about what is happening to you and your baby in each stage of your pregnancy along with good information about nutrition, exercise, taking care of yourself in pregnancy, getting good antenatal care, and getting ready for labour and birth. You'll also learn about the stages of labour and giving birth and what happens in the first days and weeks after your baby is born. It's also important that you know about some of the complications that can occur for mothers and their babies during pregnancy, labour and birth so there are sections dealing with these situations. We've also included some important information for you and your partner about how relationships change with pregnancy and the arrival of a baby, and about understanding your emotions as you adjust to all the changes in your life.

## Information you can count on

There's lots of information around about pregnancy – some of it's good and some of it's not so good.

*Having a baby* has reliable (at the time of publication) information that's either based on research or that many women have found helpful. For further information, or to discuss any concerns you have, it is important to consult your health professional.



Telephone interpreters are available free of charge to anyone who wants to use health services in NSW. If you need an interpreter to contact any of the services listed in this document, you can ring the Translating and Interpreter Services (TIS) on 131 450.

When you ring TIS, you will first be asked by the operator for the language you require (e.g. Arabic, Korean etc). Depending on the language it may take a few minutes to connect you with an interpreter. Once the language interpreter is on line, you will then be asked for the service you want to contact. Have the contact details of the service ready. You will then have a three-way conversation using the telephone interpreter to communicate with the service.

# What if you're not pregnant yet, but are planning to be?

This book is for you too. It has information on things you can do *before* you get pregnant to promote a healthy pregnancy.

**Pre-conception advice** is available from your General Practitioner (GP), women's health nurse or midwife.

**See your GP for a full health check especially if you have any health problems.** Some health problems can be affected by pregnancy e.g. diabetes, depression, high blood pressure and epilepsy. Also ask about any medications you are taking that could affect a developing baby. It's important not to stop any medications (prescription, over-the-counter and complementary medicines) until you have discussed it with your doctor.

**Have a dental check-up.** Bleeding gums happen when plaque builds up on teeth and irritates your gums. In pregnancy, hormonal changes can make your gums more easily irritated and inflamed. Keep your teeth clean, especially near the gum line. It will dramatically reduce or even prevent gum disease during pregnancy.

**See your GP to check if you require vaccination** or are protected against measles, mumps, rubella, varicella (chicken pox). Plan well ahead as you may need to have tests done to check your immunity against these diseases. You should avoid getting pregnant for 28 days following vaccination with the measles-mumps-rubella vaccine and varicella vaccines. Experts recommend that women planning to get pregnant and pregnant women get vaccinated against influenza (the flu). This vaccination can be safely given at any time in pregnancy.

You should get a pertussis (whooping cough) vaccination during the third trimester of your pregnancy. Your partner, the baby's grandparents and other regular carers of the baby should get vaccinated against pertussis before the baby is born. It is also important that your other children are vaccinated against pertussis.

**Talk to your GP about your family health history.** If you or your partner have a family history of a genetic problem like cystic fibrosis or thalassaemia, you might find genetic counselling helpful. For more information, see *Prenatal testing and genetic counselling* on page 114.

**Start taking a folic acid supplement.** Start it at least one month before you are pregnant. The usual dose is 0.5mg daily, though some women may be advised by their doctor to take a higher dose. For more information, see *Handle with care: looking after yourself in pregnancy* on page 11.

**Change your habits.** Cigarettes, alcohol, illicit and other drugs can harm unborn babies. If you need help to quit smoking or information about how alcohol and drugs can affect your pregnancy, see *Handle with care: looking after yourself in pregnancy* on page 11.

**Lose weight if you are overweight or obese.** It's best for you and your baby if you can get to a healthy weight before you get pregnant. Women who are a healthy weight before pregnancy may find it easier to become pregnant and are less likely to have serious complications like high blood pressure or diabetes during pregnancy. Check with your doctor or midwife if you're unsure what your ideal weight is.

For more information visit the Get Healthy website at [www.gethealthynsw.com.au](http://www.gethealthynsw.com.au)

**Make sure your workplace is safe.** Most workplaces are safe in pregnancy, but some people work with substances or equipment that can harm an unborn baby or damage male sperm. If you want to make sure the equipment and substances you work with are safe, ask your doctor, occupational health and safety officer, union representative or employer. For more information, see *Handle with care: looking after yourself in pregnancy* on page 11.

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## Words to know

**Abdomen** Belly, tummy or stomach.

**Afterbirth** The placenta. It provides the baby with food and oxygen. It's attached to your baby by the umbilical cord.

**Amniotic fluid** The liquid the baby floats in inside the uterus. Sometimes called 'the waters'.

**Amniotic sac** The bag holding the fluid and the baby inside the uterus.

**Amniotomy** A midwife or doctor breaks the amniotic sac which holds the fluid and the baby inside the uterus.

**Anaesthetist** A doctor who specialises in providing pain relief.

**Anaemia** A deficiency in the number or quality of red blood cells.

**Antenatal (Prenatal)** The time during pregnancy, up until labour and birth.

**Anus** The back passage.

**Areola** The circular dark area around the nipple.

**Apnoea** The baby stops breathing and needs help to start again.

**Augmentation** Medical treatment which may help labour to progress.

**Birth canal** Vagina.

**Birth plan** A written plan which says what you would like to happen during labour and birth.

**Birth weight** The weight of the baby when it's first born. 'Low birth weight' means weighing less than 2500 grams.

**Braxton Hicks contractions** Contractions that some women feel in late pregnancy. They are not labour contractions – more like the body practising for labour.

**Breech birth** When the baby is born feet or bottom first.

**Caesarean section operation** An operation to deliver the baby. The doctor cuts the abdomen and uterus open to remove the baby.

**Cervix** The neck of the uterus.

**Contraction** When the muscles in the uterus (womb) tighten.

**Diaphragm** The muscle between your chest and your abdomen.

**Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT)** A condition caused by a clot in one of the deep veins of the body.

**Ectopic pregnancy** When a fertilised egg attaches anywhere outside the uterus, most commonly in a fallopian tube.

**EDB** Short for estimated date of birth, which is the estimated date your baby is due.

**Embryo** The baby is known as an embryo until about the 12th week of pregnancy.

**Epidural** A type of anaesthetic that makes you numb below the waist.

**Episiotomy** A surgical cut in the area between the mother's vagina and anus that may be done during labour.

**Fallopian tubes** Tubes that lead from each ovary to the uterus.

**Fetus** The baby is known as a fetus after about the 12th week of pregnancy.

**Folate/Folic Acid** An important B vitamin found in green leafy vegetables, cereals, fruits and grains. It's also available in supplement form.

**Forceps** Surgical instruments that fit around the baby's head. They can be used to help the baby out of the vagina.

**Genetic counsellor** A health professional who provides information and support if there is a risk that your baby has a genetic condition.

**General Practitioner (GP)** A local medical practitioner (doctor) who treats acute and chronic illnesses and provides preventive care and health education.

**Gestation** The length of pregnancy usually measured in weeks.

**Hypertension** High blood pressure.

**Induction** An intervention to start the labour rather than waiting for it to happen naturally.

**Internal examination** The doctor or midwife puts two gloved fingers into the vagina to check on the progress of labour.

**Intervention** Using a medical treatment or instrument to help in labour or birth (e.g. forceps or an induction).

**Jaundice** A yellowness of the skin, sometimes seen in newborns.

**Lactation consultant** A health professional with extra training to support women experiencing breastfeeding challenges.

**Lochia** Bleeding from the vagina in the weeks after giving birth.

**Mastitis** Inflammation or infection of the breast.

**Midwife** Health professional who cares for women and their babies during pregnancy, labour, birthing and the postnatal period.

**Miscarriage** The loss of a baby before the 20th week of pregnancy.

**Neonatal** To do with the first 28 days after birth. 'Neonatal care' means care of newborn babies.

**Neonatologist** Doctor who specialises in caring for newborn babies especially if the baby is unwell.

**Nuchal Translucency Test** An ultrasound scan to screen for congenital conditions in a baby.

**Obstetrician** Doctor who specialises in caring for women during pregnancy, labour and birthing.

**Ovary** Ovary produces eggs (ova). Women have two ovaries.

**Ovum** Egg produced by the ovary.

**Paediatrician** Doctor who specialises in caring for babies and children.

**Pap smear test** A screening test for cervical cancer.

**Pelvic floor** A group of muscles which supports your uterus, bladder and bowel.

**Perineum** The area between the vagina and anus.

**Placenta** This provides the baby with food and oxygen while in the uterus. It's attached to the inside of your uterus at one end and at the other to the baby via its umbilical cord. It's also called the afterbirth.

**Placenta praevia** When the placenta is close to or covers the cervix.

**Postnatal (Postpartum period)** The first six weeks after the baby is born.

**Postpartum haemorrhage** Heavier than normal bleeding after giving birth.

**Pre-eclampsia** Serious condition with symptoms of very high blood pressure, headaches and visual disturbances.

**Premature** When a baby is born before the 37th week of pregnancy.

**Quickening** When the mother first feels the baby moving in pregnancy.

**Show** Passing the mucus 'plug' which seals the cervix.

**Stillbirth** When a baby dies in the uterus and is born after the 20<sup>th</sup> week of pregnancy.

**Trimester** Pregnancy is divided into three trimesters. The first trimester is from week one to week 12, the second trimester is from week 13 to week 26 and the third trimester is from week 27 to the birth of the baby.

**Ultrasound** A way of looking inside the body from the outside using sound waves. These tests are used in pregnancy to check on the size, growth and wellbeing of the baby.

**Umbilical cord** The cord that joins the placenta to the baby.

**Uterus** Womb. The part of the body where the baby grows.

**Vacuum extraction** A process to help the mother deliver the baby. A cup-like instrument is attached to the baby's head in the vagina using suction. The doctor then pulls gently while the mother pushes the baby out.

**Vagina** Birth canal.

**VBAC** Vaginal Birth After Caesarean section operation.

"You realise that everything in your life is going to change – but because the baby hasn't been born yet, you don't know exactly how it's going to change. It's a strange feeling, especially when you're so used to having things under control. You feel as if you're heading into some unknown place." Carolyn