

Folic acid supplements are available over-the-counter (OTC), at pharmacies. The daily pre-conception recommended dose of folic acid is 0.4 mg and one should continue this until the 12th week of pregnancy, while the baby's spine develops.

However, a woman has a higher risk of having a baby affected by an NTD, if either she, or her partner, has an NTD, has had a previous pregnancy affected by an NTD, coeliac disease (a condition caused by a sensitivity to gluten), is obese, diabetic, or taking antiepileptic or other anti-folic acid medications.

If any of the above applies to a woman, she will need to take a higher dose of folic acid to help baby's spine develop properly. She should take 5mg of folic acid daily before conception, and until the 12th week of pregnancy.

### **Vaccinations and screening tests**

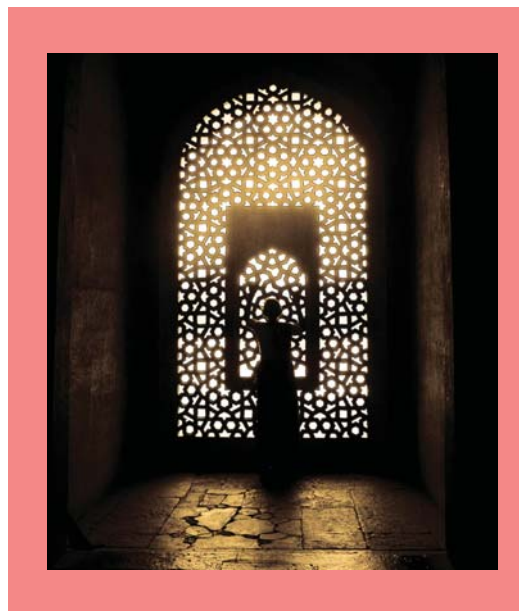
When a woman is pregnant, as well as paying close attention to her diet and lifestyle, she also needs to make sure that she is up-to-date with vaccinations, such as rubella and varicella.

### **Cervical screening**

If a woman is planning a pregnancy and is due for a cervical smear test, she will need to have it before she conceives. This is because pregnancy can make the results of a smear test more difficult to interpret.

### **Advice for men**

As well as there being health guidelines and recommendations for women trying to conceive (or who are already pregnant), many of the recommendations also apply to men as well. Men are advised to cut down on drinking alcohol and smoking because they have been shown to decrease the quality of sperm, and the chances of their partner conceiving. Some doctors suggest that wearing loose underwear helps sperm production by providing a cooler environment.



### **Appointments:**

020 8401 9928  
office@miscarriageclinic.co.uk  
www.miscarriageclinic.co.uk

### **Surrey:**

Ashtead Hospital, The Warren, Ashtead KT21 2SB  
The Clockhouse Medical Practice, 4 Dorking Road,  
Epsom KT18 7 LX

### **London:**

84 Harley Street, London W1G 7HW  
Parkside Hospital, 53 Parkside,  
Wimbledon SW19 5NX  
Woman's Wellness Centre, 204 Fulham Road,  
Chelsea SW10 9PJ

## **Preconception Service**



**An information leaflet for patients & clinicians**

## Introduction

The term preconception refers to the period leading up to a pregnancy, from the decision to have a baby, to becoming pregnant.

Preconception care involves taking good care of oneself before becoming pregnant (as well as during your pregnancy) by ensuring that healthy eating and regular exercise. Up-to-date vaccinations, such as rubella and chickenpox are also important.

If a couple are trying to conceive, they should seek advice from healthcare professionals, such as GPs, who can provide further advice and information to ensure the best possible health for mother and baby.

Because not all pregnancies are planned, some women will only start to monitor their health, in relation to their baby, once they are already pregnant. However, for couples who plan their pregnancies, preconception care can help them to make the necessary changes in advance.

Preconception care involves an assessment of lifestyle, health, and fitness, by a health professional, in order to identify areas for improvement. These can include an unhealthy diet, lack of exercise, and other factors, such as smoking, or drug use, which can cause harm to an unborn baby. Although preconception care focuses mainly on the mother's health, there are also changes that the father can make.

Another important part of preconception care is to ensure that any long-lasting medical problems are controlled as effectively as possible before pregnancy. These chronic health problems, such as diabetes, epilepsy, and asthma, can cause an increased risk of many complications for both mother and baby during pregnancy and birth.

## Preconception Service

Mr Hassan Shehata MD FRCOG MRCPI is a UK based Consultant Obstetrician and Gynaecologist and a subspecialist in Maternal Medicine. His NHS base is at Epsom and St. Helier University Hospitals. He is also an Honorary Senior Lecturer in Obstetrics & Gynaecology at St George's Hospital Medical School, University of London.

His clinical interests include preconception counselling. His management involves a detailed investigation of pre-existing medical conditions with a discussion of the impact of any such condition on the mother and baby. He will also discuss the effect of a pregnancy on pre-existing medical conditions.

During the preconception assessment, genetically inherited conditions (those that are passed on from the parents) can be identified. Couples with a high risk pregnancy can be given support and advice. Being aware of the risks will enable couples to make informed choices when planning their pregnancy.



Mr Shehata's other specialities include private obstetric care, recurrent miscarriages and hormone replacement therapy for women with other illnesses or physiological problems. This care extends to those women who are already pregnant but have come either with medical complications, who are on medication.

## Recommendations

Depending on how healthy one's lifestyle is already, when pregnant, dietary changes, drinking habits, and the amount of exercise may need to be adjusted.

### Self-care

To ensure that a pregnancy goes as smoothly as possible, and to ensure the baby is as healthy as possible, women need to make sure to take good care of themselves and follow the self-care guidelines outlined below.

### Alcohol

It is best to avoid drinking alcohol completely if planning a pregnancy, and also during pregnancy. If a woman is trying to conceive, she may be unaware that she is pregnant until several weeks into the pregnancy, so one should stop drinking alcohol before any damage can be done. Drinking alcohol while pregnant can be harmful to the unborn baby.

### Body weight

Women who are overweight or obese are more likely to need a Caesarean section, and are at higher risk of developing conditions such as pregnancy diabetes and high blood pressure with possible significant mother and baby complications. If overweight, or obese, before trying to become pregnant, it is best for a woman to get as close to the ideal weight as she can.

### Folic acid

Taking folic acid supplements three months before and during pregnancy can reduce the risk of your baby being born with a neural tube defect (NTD).