

**PLANNING FOR PREGNANCY**

*By Janet Starr, Prenatal Education Coordinator, Overlake Hospital Medical Center*

**A**lthough pregnancy is unfamiliar territory for many prospective parents, planning is something they already do quite often in their lives. They may have already planned a wedding or overseen a business. Fortunately, planning for pregnancy has similarities. By consulting experts, gathering information and developing a plan, prospective parents are much better prepared to make important decisions, celebrate their growing family and manage the inevitable ups and downs associated with parenting.

While there is a wealth of information available about pregnancy and childbirth, some of it is conflicting. Consider your sources and look for the most evidence-based and up-to-date information. At Overlake, we take a holistic approach to family planning and encourage couples to consider a range of issues, such as birth planning and physical prepa-

rations, prenatal testing and care, relationship issues and financial concerns.

Women planning for pregnancy should first consider their overall health. Good physical shape can help provide optimum growth and development for the baby and will help mom through pregnancy, childbirth and recovery. Regular exercise and a healthy diet with adequate folic acid is important to health. Smoking, alcohol and drugs—including over-the-counter medications—are concerns during pregnancy. Since there is no “safe” time during pregnancy to consume alcohol or tobacco, planning for pregnancy provides a great motivation to quit these unhealthy habits. Fathers are encouraged to follow suit, sharing the commitment and offering moral support.

Along with taking good care of yourself, it’s important to find a

healthcare provider you trust who supports your ideas about childbirth and breastfeeding.

In addition, there are other ways to assess and maintain maternal health. Prenatal tests help identify potential health issues for mom or baby. Screening and diagnostic tests can identify gestational diabetes, high blood pressure or preeclampsia that can affect the health of both mother and child. Ultrasound is a low-risk test that determines fetal placement, growth and the sex of the baby. Genetic tests diagnose possible genetic abnormalities including Down’s syndrome. Many of these tests are optional. It’s important to talk with your partner about which tests to consider and what you’ll do with the information.

Having a baby adds complexities to a couple’s relationship. It’s important to talk about family histories, priorities and child rearing before a baby arrives. Many couples often don’t realize how different their approaches to parenting might be. Working through these concerns early can help establish better family harmony and reduce surprises after the baby arrives.

Starting a family also has financial implications. Financial experts recommend starting a savings account to pay for setting up the baby’s room, baby-proofing the house and even establishing a college fund. To estimate the additional monthly costs of a growing family, couples can refer to many online calculators that itemize common costs. Couples also need to review their health, homeowners and auto insurance and family policies. Many experts recommend starting a life insurance policy and creating a will before the baby is born. Day care may be another budgetary consideration.

Having a baby is one of life’s biggest decisions, and it only makes sense to take time to consider all the facets of planning beforehand. By informing yourselves, supporting each other and planning ahead, you’re encouraging a wonderful start for your child and your lives as parents.

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