

# How to Build a Healthy Baby



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by/par health **nexus** santé

You plan for school, work, holidays and even your retirement. What about your baby?

We used to think that all a man needed to do to prepare for a baby was save some money and set up the crib, but many things contribute to having a healthy baby. We now know that the health of the man plays an important role in his ability to create a baby and to have healthy children.



When conception does not occur as planned, the cause is sometimes due to the man, sometimes due to the woman and sometimes due to a combination of both.

## Factors That Can Affect Your Sperm

**Health conditions** – A family history of certain health conditions, some medications and diseases take on new meaning when planning for a baby. High blood pressure, arthritis, depression, cancer, mumps, diabetes, Hepatitis B, sexually transmitted infections and HIV can affect your chances for making a pregnancy happen or having a healthy baby.

**Sperm quality** – Sperm is continuously produced. It takes about three months for sperm to fully develop and its quality may be affected by many factors during that time: heat, chemicals, recreational and prescription drugs, infections, etc. For example, cocaine may increase the number of abnormal sperm. Sperm quality also decreases gradually as men age.

**Alcohol** – alcohol can damage the quality of sperm. Research says heavy alcohol use may affect sperm formation and function, or may cause impotence.



**Tobacco** – sperm quality can be affected by smoking. Research also indicates a slight increase in certain types of cancer in children of fathers who smoke. Smoking can make it harder for a man to get an erection. The sperm also can't swim as

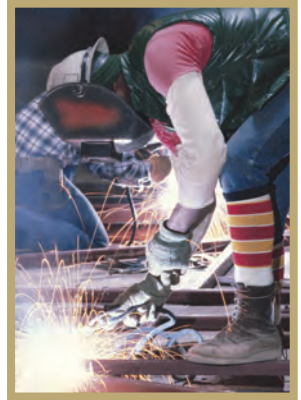
fast to reach the egg. The sperm of smokers has a harder time getting into the woman's egg to create a pregnancy.



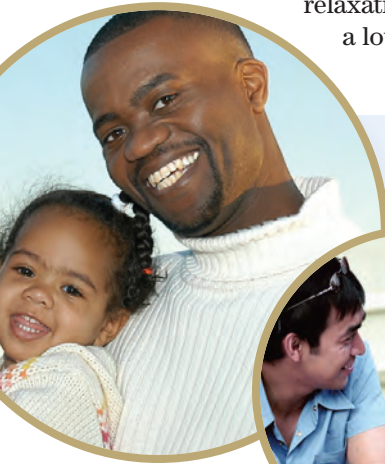
**Nutrition** – you are what you eat. If your body is poorly fed and nourished, so are your sperm and sex drive. A varied diet can provide the nutrients you need.

Vitamin C is particularly important for people who smoke.

**Workplace toxins** – sperm can be affected by toxins or poisons in your environment. You might face these on the job or at home and not realize it. Exposure to toxins and poisons such as lead and pesticides before pregnancy can affect sperm quality. Your work clothes may also bring home contaminants to your pregnant partner.



**Heat** – some men who work in extremely hot environments such as foundries or bakeries or use hot tubs and saunas for relaxation have experienced a low sperm count.



## Supporting each other

Now is the time to be sure about your relationship, before you start planning a pregnancy.

Having a baby does not make a bad relationship better; it only adds to the stress. Having a child results in a lifelong connection to your partner.

# Is there a baby in your future?

## Plan for it. Here is what you can do.

- ✓ **Find out about your family health history.** Contact your health care provider or a genetics clinic if there are any family medical conditions you are concerned about such as severe allergies, heart malformations or mental disorders.
- ✓ **Review your medication with your health care provider.** Prescription, over-the-counter and recreational drugs can affect the quality and quantity of sperm. Herbal medicines and body-building supplements are drugs too! You may need to change the dosage, stop using the drug, or change to a different drug before planning a pregnancy.
- ✓ **Make sure your immunizations are up-to-date.** Have you had infections such as chicken pox or rubella (German measles)? If not, you need to be immunized before planning a pregnancy. Such infections could damage the sperm; they could also increase the risk of infecting your partner, even if she has been immunized, as immunizations are not always 100% effective.
- ✓ **Stop drinking alcohol and smoking before planning a pregnancy.** It is recommended to do so for healthy sperm. Second-hand smoke can impact the fetus. Heavy drinking may limit your ability to be a good father and a good partner. If you have concerns, contact your health care provider or local addiction services.
- ✓ **A healthy diet builds healthy sperm.** Make sure you are getting all the nutrients your body needs.
- ✓ **Find out about environmental risks.** The environment at your workplace, in your home, in your garden and in your workshop may have contaminants that can damage the sperm. Reduce risks where possible.
- ✓ **Talk with your partner about your readiness to become parents.** Sort out relationship issues before planning a pregnancy. For help, talk to your health care provider or a local counselling service.
- ✓ **Educate yourself.** Find out about healthy pregnancies and the benefits of breastfeeding.
- ✓ **Support your partner.** Encourage her in healthy lifestyle choices such as not drinking alcohol when planning or during a pregnancy.

For more information on planning a pregnancy, visit [www.healthbeforepregnancy.ca](http://www.healthbeforepregnancy.ca) and see the last page of this brochure.





## Pre-test: Are you ready for fatherhood?

- Do I like children?
- How do I feel about having a child around all the time?
- Could I handle a child and a job at the same time?
- Do I qualify for a parental leave?
- Do I welcome the opportunity of falling in love with my child?
- Who are my role models?
- Can I identify myself as a dad?
- What skills can I share with and teach to my children?
- Am I ready to change my daily routine to meet my baby's needs?
- Can I afford to support a child?
- Am I patient enough to deal with the noise and the confusion and the 24-hour a day responsibility?
- What kind of time and space do I need for myself?
- Am I ready to make family my priority?



# Creating healthier fathers and babies

## Soon you will be a father. Fathers matter to their children.

Did you know that father involvement has been linked to children who have:

- better mental health?
- better ability to cope with stress, disappointment and frustration?
- better grades in school?

## For health information:

- Talk to your health care provider or phone Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000.
- Contact your local public health unit by calling ServiceOntario at 1-800-267-8097.
- For nutrition information contact EatRight Ontario at [ontario.ca/eatright](http://ontario.ca/eatright) 1-877-510-510-2. You can also download Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide at [www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/index-eng.php](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/index-eng.php).
- For information on workplace hazards, visit the Workplace Hazardous Materials Info System at [www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ewh-sent/occup-travail/whmis-simdut/index-eng.php](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ewh-sent/occup-travail/whmis-simdut/index-eng.php).
- If you would like help to quit smoking, contact the Smokers' Helpline, 1-877-513-5333; [www.smokershelpline.ca](http://www.smokershelpline.ca).
- For information about environmental health threats for men and boys, visit [www.healthyenvironmentforkids.ca](http://www.healthyenvironmentforkids.ca).

## For father information, visit these Canadian websites:

- **[www.healthbeforepregnancy.ca](http://www.healthbeforepregnancy.ca)** – Information on health and parenting issues for men and women before pregnancy.
- **[www.dadcentral.ca](http://www.dadcentral.ca)** – Tips, information, resources and downloadable booklets on father involvement and its importance.
- **[www.fira.ca](http://www.fira.ca)** – Research information for immigrant fathers, gay-bi-queer fathers, separated and divorced fathers, indigenous fathers, fathers with special needs and young fathers.

## This international website also contain useful information:

- **[www.greatdad.com](http://www.greatdad.com)** – Practical tips on a wide variety of topics for fathers.

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[www.beststart.org](http://www.beststart.org) | [www.healthnexus.ca](http://www.healthnexus.ca)