

#	Age & Stage	Theme	Title
2	Preconception	Future fathers' health	Did you know that the brain of a future baby can be affected by the father's health, even before conception?

It is best to make changes when you are thinking about conceiving a baby. If you are planning a pregnancy, it is best to:

- ◆ Stop using recreational drugs such as marijuana and cocaine. Drugs may increase the number of abnormal sperm. The effect of recreational drugs may not be identified immediately at birth. The effects may show up at a later date in the form of learning disabilities. It is safer to stop using recreational drugs before conceiving.
- ◆ Review your medication with your health care provider. Prescription and over-the-counter 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.
- ◆ Take a look at the toxic substances that may be in your home, workplace and where you spend leisure time. It takes about three months for sperm to fully develop. Sperm quality may be affected by many factors during that time: heat, chemicals, recreational and prescription drugs, infections, etc. Sperm quality also decreases gradually as men age.
- ◆ If you are exposed to potentially harmful substances at work, talk with your employer about alternative arrangements. Be aware that toxic substances, such as chemicals in dust, can travel home with you on your clothing, hair and skin. This may not be safe for your partner and future baby.
- ◆ Stop drinking alcohol and smoking before planning a pregnancy. Heavy alcohol use may affect sperm shape and function. Heavy drinking can also affect your ability to be a supportive father and partner. Second-hand smoke can impact the fetus, so consider stopping smoking before the baby is conceived. If you have concerns, contact your health care provider or local addiction services.
- ◆ Ensure your immunizations are up to date. Get immunized for chicken pox and rubella (German measles) if you have not had those infections.
- ◆ Get screened for sexually transmitted infections. These can affect the health of the baby.
- ◆ Find out about your own health and your family's health history. High blood pressure, arthritis, depression, cancer, mumps, diabetes, and Hepatitis B can affect your chances of having a healthy baby. 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 health concerns.
- ◆ Make sure you are getting all the nutrients your body needs. A healthy diet builds healthy sperm.
- ◆ Take time to be active every day. The Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines recommend that adults get at least 2.5 hours of moderate to vigorous physical activity per week. Support your partner's physical activity needs.
- ◆ To be an involved father, find out about pregnancy, labour, birth and child development issues. Did you know that mothers who have a supportive, involved partner breastfeed more successfully?

Now is a great time to make positive changes in your habits for both you and your partner. This will give you good health before you conceive, and create healthy habits for your future growing family.

#2 Links

- ◆ *Is there a baby in your future? Plan for it.* Best Start Resource Centre. www.healthbeforepregnancy.ca
- ◆ *How to Build a Healthy Baby.* Best Start Resource Centre. www.beststart.org/resources/preconception/men_health_bro_2012.pdf