What you really need to know if you're planning a baby.

Helpful hints from SMA Nutrition

TAKING GOOD CARE OF YOU AND YOUR BABY
Help from people with experience.

Planning to have a baby is an important decision and, like every prospective mum-to-be, you want your baby to have the best start in life.

This booklet gives useful tips on how you and your partner can prepare for pregnancy. It has been written by people with experience of pregnancy and motherhood, so it is full of realistic and practical advice.

As we aim to constantly improve the quality of the booklets and information we offer to mums and dads, your feedback is greatly appreciated. If you have any tips you think other parents would find useful, or comments on how we could improve this booklet, you can write to us or ring the SMA Caroline. To all those who have already done so, and whose comments we’ve tried to incorporate in this booklet, we’d like to say thank you.

Remember, if you have any further questions or concerns your GP, practice midwife, health visitor, public health nurse or family planning advisor are always happy to help.
Q. Why is it important to plan and prepare for my pregnancy?

A. To ensure you are as fit as possible, both mentally and physically, so you can cope with the rigours of pregnancy.

A baby’s fastest development occurs during the first 8-10 weeks of pregnancy. This is a particularly vulnerable time, especially as many women may not even be aware that they are pregnant.

A healthy, pre-pregnancy routine will ensure you’re mentally and physically in good shape and this will have a positive effect on your baby, not just at birth but for the rest of her life.

You may have had problems in the past, such as a miscarriage or problems conceiving, and planning your pregnancy could help you towards a successful pregnancy.

Q. When should I start preparing for my pregnancy?

A. Preferably three to six months before you plan to conceive.

Don’t worry if you don’t conceive straight away. It may take several months and this is perfectly normal.

try to be patient. If you are trying for a baby but do not conceive after a year or so, you may wish to see your GP or family planning clinic just to rule out any possible fertility problems.

Q. When should we stop using contraception?

A. Not until you feel ready for pregnancy.

Continue with your usual method of contraception until you and your partner feel ready for pregnancy.

If you have been using a barrier method of contraception (cap or condom), you can stop using these and start trying for a baby at any time.

If you have been taking the pill, it is best to wait for at least a month after you have stopped taking the pill before trying for a baby. Don’t forget to use a different form of contraception, like a condom or cap, until you’re ready to conceive.

Whichever method of contraception you have been using, you’ll need to keep a note of the dates of your periods. Your baby’s due date will be calculated from the first day of your last period.

Your GP or family planning clinic will be able to answer any further questions you may have.
Q. Physically, is there anything I can do to prepare for my pregnancy?

A. Try to get fit and healthy.

Regular exercise is important for both you and your partner because, once your baby comes along, you're both going to need all your energy, so it's better to start getting in shape now.

Exercise can be fun and it's easier to make changes to your lifestyle together. Swimming is excellent for stretching and toning all your body muscles and is something you can continue throughout your pregnancy.

But don't think you have to start training for the Olympics. Simple things like walking up the stairs at work, instead of taking the lift, and walking to the shops, rather than taking the bus or driving, can easily become part of your daily routine.

It's also a good idea to have a general health check-up. This is the ideal time to ask your GP for advice and have any queries you may have answered.
Q. Do I need to take any special supplements or extra vitamins?
A. Yes, you need to take a special vitamin called folic acid.

The Department of Health now recommends that all women planning to have a baby should take a daily supplement of 400 microgrammes of folic acid from the time they decide to begin trying for a baby, until the end of the twelfth week of pregnancy. This can help to reduce the risk of spina bifida and other neural tube defects.

Folic acid supplements are easily available at your local pharmacy and some supplemented milk drinks are also on sale. Your pharmacist will be happy to advise which ones are suitable. You should also try to eat foods which are rich in folic acid such as:

- Raw or lightly cooked green vegetables
- Green salad
- Fresh fruit
- Fortified breakfast cereals
- Wholemeal bread

If you have had a previous pregnancy affected by spina bifida or are taking any medication for epilepsy, speak to your GP before taking any supplements.

Q. Can smoking and drinking affect my fertility?
A. Yes.

Regularly drinking alcohol, even in small quantities, can affect fertility, in both men and women.

If you're a smoker, your baby is more likely to be born prematurely and may have a lower birth weight. You are also more at risk of having a miscarriage. Even second hand

“passive” smoking can affect you, so try to stay out of smoky places or where others are smoking.

As part of a healthier routine, it's a good idea to try to stop smoking and cut down on the amount of alcohol you drink. This will benefit you and also any future pregnancies.

Your healthcare professional will be happy to give you any help and support you need.

Q. Why is a dental check-up recommended before my pregnancy?
A. Some forms of dental care, such as x-rays, can be harmful to your unborn baby once you conceive.

Book yourself a pre-pregnancy check-up now, so you can have any necessary dental treatment that may be harmful to your baby before you conceive.

During your pregnancy, you may find you're more prone to gum problems, but regular visits to your dentist will keep any potential problems at bay.