What you really need to know about pregnancy.

Helpful hints from SMA Nutrition
TAKING GOOD CARE OF YOU AND YOUR BABY
Help from people with experience.

So, you’ve just found out you’re pregnant! Congratulations!

Becoming pregnant is one of the most exciting things that can happen to you. However, it’s perfectly normal to feel scared, anxious and apprehensive. If this is your first baby, you may feel bombarded with information which can set your head spinning.

That’s why this booklet sets out to provide some simple answers to some of the concerns and questions you may have, and to give you a few tips that will help you to understand some of the changes that your body is going through. It will also help you deal with some of the irritations pregnancy can bring! It has been prepared by people with experience of pregnancy and motherhood, so it’s 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 Carline. 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.
Q. I've just found out I'm pregnant... is there anything I should do now?

A. Most people visit their GP as soon as they know they are pregnant. The GP will arrange your 'booking appointment' with a midwife for when you are about 10-12 weeks pregnant. Your midwife will then 'book you into the system', arrange the tests available within your local health area, discuss the roles of the healthcare professionals you'll meet throughout your pregnancy and answer any questions you might have. The various tests which may be offered to you at booking are not covered within this booklet as they vary from area to area and with individual circumstances. Please ask your midwife to discuss what is available to you within your area at your booking appointment.

Q. When is my baby due?

A. You can use the chart below to work out approximately when your baby is due. This date will be called your EDD (expected date of delivery) or EDC (expected date of confinement). It is an approximate guide as to the date your baby will be born and is based on a regular monthly menstrual cycle of 28 days. It is a date to have in mind, but your baby could be born any time from 2 weeks before to 2 weeks after this date. To calculate your EDD, pick out the FIRST DAY OF YOUR LAST monthly period from the text in pink. The date that appears beneath is your EDD (in blue type).

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Q. Is there anything I should be taking to supplement my diet?

A. If you weren't taking folic acid supplements before you became pregnant, you should start to take them now and continue until the twelfth week of your pregnancy. Folic acid is a vitamin which can help to prevent spina bifida and other serious problems in your developing baby. You can buy folic acid supplements as tablets or as part of special fortified milk drinks from most pharmacies, Boots, etc., or your GP may prescribe them for you.

Foods that are rich in folic acid include spinach, broccoli, cabbage, lettuce, wholemeal bread and brown rice.

If you have had a baby with spina bifida before or are taking medication for epilepsy, it is important to talk to your GP before taking folic acid supplements.
Q. Before I knew I was pregnant, I'd been feeling funny for a while. Was this normal?

A. Yes. By the time you find out you are pregnant, your body has already begun to adapt to look after your growing baby. Some of the following signs can indicate you are pregnant, and you may now remember having experienced some of them! A number of them are likely to continue throughout your pregnancy. Some women don't have any of these symptoms, they just "know" that they are pregnant. If you suspect you are pregnant, the most reliable first sign for women who have a regular monthly cycle is a missed period, although some women can still lose a little blood in a light period even when they are pregnant.

**Being constipated.**

To avoid constipation, include plenty of high fibre foods in your diet - wholemeal bread, cereals, fruit and vegetables - and drink plenty of fluids. This type of diet early in pregnancy, little and often, can also help to relieve the effects of morning sickness.

**Changes in your breasts.**

Often your breasts may become larger and sore or tender, like they do before a period. They may also tingle or itch. The veins may show up more and your nipples could become darker and stand out more. You may not have thought anything more of this at the time as it can occur as early as 4 weeks into your pregnancy, about the time you missed your period.

**Increase in vaginal discharge (Leucorrhoea).**

Most women notice that they have more vaginal discharge during pregnancy. This should be clear or white in colour and not have any smell to it. If it is any other colour or is "smelly", then you should see your midwife or doctor as this may be a sign that you have a vaginal infection.

If you have a lot of discharge, you may feel fresher if you wear panty liners as these can be changed regularly. It is important that you keep yourself clean "down below," in the vaginal area, as this will help prevent an infection from developing.

Wearing cotton underwear can help, but avoid using soap as this can cause irritation.

**Mood changes.**

During pregnancy your body is going through an immense period of change and your hormone levels are changing rapidly.

You may also be feeling anxious, excited, frightened and extremely tired.

This all leads to you having frequent mood changes and often leaves you feeling very emotional. You may cry for no reason or feel tense and irritable.

It is important that your partner or family understand that this is likely to happen and that it is not likely to be as a result of something they have said or done.
Needing to pass urine more often (frequency of micturition).

This is common in the first 12 weeks, and also later in pregnancy. In early pregnancy, this is because your womb (uterus) is growing and pushes on your bladder, therefore your bladder can’t fill as much and you have to empty it more often. When you do go to the toilet you may find you only pass a small amount of urine, which can be frustrating when you feel like you would burst!

When you get to about 12 weeks, the womb begins to rise out of the pelvis, so the pressure in your bladder begins to be relieved. By about 34 - 36 weeks, your baby’s head is likely to enter the pelvis ready for the delivery. This again, puts pressure on the bladder.

You may find at this stage that rocking backwards and forwards when sitting on the toilet helps empty your bladder.

If you experience any burning or if your urine smells strong or fishy, you should consult your healthcare professional as this may be a sign that you have a urine infection.

Period-like pains.

You may experience period-like pains as the placenta attaches itself to the wall of your womb. This is perfectly normal and healthy, and can be felt between 4 - 6 weeks into your pregnancy. Sometimes this feeling is alarming and can be quite a sharp pain. If you have severe pain or bleeding or faintness, get medical help immediately.

Pregnancy or morning sickness.

This is most common between about weeks 4 - 16 of your pregnancy and you may feel nauseous or actually be sick.

It is often called morning sickness, but it can happen at any time of day and is thought to be caused by hormonal changes.

You may find you go off certain foods that you normally enjoy (tea or coffee are common ones) and the smell of certain foods cooking may make you feel worse.

Usually these symptoms gradually wear off between about 12 - 16 weeks of pregnancy, but if they persist and are troublesome after this time, then discuss them with your midwife or doctor.

Although there is no absolute cure for pregnancy sickness, some of the following tips may help:

- If you feel sick in the morning, try to get out of bed slowly so your body doesn’t change position too quickly.
- Having a cup of tea and/or a biscuit before you get up may help but obviously this may be difficult if you are on your own in the morning.
- Ginger biscuits may help when you begin to feel nauseous.