The Excitement of 'the Bump' Includes Preconception and Prenatal Health Care

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YOU'VE DECIDED IT'S TIME TO HAVE A BABY. NOW YOUR IMAGINATION TAKES YOU TO CUTE LITTLE OUTFITS AND IMAGES OF TINY TOES. IT'S AN EXCITING TIME TO LAUNCH INTO THE MOMENT AND DREAM BIG DREAMS. IT'S ALSO A GOOD TIME TO PREPARE YOUR BODY FOR THIS IMPORTANT EVENT!

If you have the opportunity to plan your pregnancy, you are one giant step ahead! You have the chance to optimize your health before your pregnancy begins. Areas to consider include improving your nutrition, planning these three healthy habits (such as quitting smoking) and starting prenatal vitamins, all of which can help translate into a healthier pregnancy and healthier baby. Making a preconception appointment with a provider you feel comfortable with is an excellent way to get started on a healthy pregnancy. Choosing a provider that you trust and feel comfortable with is extremely important. You want to work with someone who you feel confident will help you work toward the experience you are hoping for throughout your pregnancy and birth. You are relying on them to help guide you with their education and experience in achieving your goals with you and your baby's health and safety in mind. Share with them your vision of your pregnancy and birth to make sure that you share a similar philosophy.

At your preconception visit, your provider will review with you your current nutrition and discuss ways to improve and fortify your nutrition to meet the needs of a developing baby. You will discuss foods to avoid in pregnancy as well. You will be encouraged to start prenatal vitamins which contain extra folic acid to facilitate normal brain and spinal cord development. Your provider will also review your weight history, looking for any health problems that may need special care during pregnancy. The family history of both you and your spouse will be considered to see if any specific screening tests are indicated to identify possible genetic issues that may be present. Discussing any medications and supplements you are taking, including herbal supplements, will help your provider to assess that they are safe in pregnancy. It is also important to evaluate if you are current with your vaccinations and discuss any that may be indicated. You will go over common things to avoid especially in early pregnancy, such as hot tubs, alcohol, and unprocessed medications, and more. Looking at your overall health early has many benefits for a healthier pregnancy.

Now, your pregnancy test is positive and a whirlwind of emotions have taken hold. It's time to schedule your first prenatal visit. A lot of vital growth happens in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy, so it's important to meet with your provider early on. These are exciting visits where even as early as five to six weeks, you may be able to see your baby's heartbeat on ultrasound and by nine to twelve weeks you can hear your baby's heartbeat with a Doppler. You will have lab work done at your initial visit that evaluates your blood type, anemia or low iron, and common conditions infections. Most providers send you home from your first visit with a pregnancy book or information so you can start reading weekly by week what's changing in your body and your developing baby. Whether this is your first or fifth baby, realizing these milestones is exciting!

Every pregnancy is like a puzzle. With each piece of information we gather during your care, we get a clearer picture of your health, the health of the pregnancy and the baby's health. You will be weighed and your abdomen measured each visit to help evaluate how the baby is growing throughout your pregnancy. At least one ultrasound is typically done approximately halfway through your pregnancy. This ultrasound is often called a screening ultrasound and can evaluate how the baby's organs are developing and look for areas of concern. It's often the time when you can find out the baby's gender if you wish. (What color should we paint the room?) Additional educational information on various topics will be shared with you throughout your pregnancy. Educational options in the community such as prenatal classes that discuss labor and birth, breastfeeding classes and support groups, sibling classes and others will be encouraged. During the course of your regular prenatal visits genetic testing options will be discussed and you will be educated for conditions that could complicate your pregnancy, including gestational diabetes and high blood pressure. Other symptoms that you are experiencing will be assessed every visit to watch for any potential complications and to help relieve some of the discomfort that you may experience while you are pregnant. The goal of your provider is to help you navigate a healthy course to a full-term pregnancy that includes healthy weight gain, appropriate baby growth and assessing for any problems or concerns that may arise, leading to a safe and healthy birth of you new little one. Regular prenatal visits significantly benefit your overall health and well-being and that of your baby.

A common question from most women is, how much weight should I gain during my pregnancy? There is a science to it, but it's not the same for everyone. Typically, if your body mass index or BMI is in the normal range of 19-25, you should gain 25-35 pounds throughout your pregnancy by eating plenty of fruits and vegetables and other healthy foods while limiting foods high in fat and sugar. From these guidelines, we then increase or decrease that range based on whether you are under or over a normal BMI.

The most important thing to remember about pregnancy is that it is often the most enjoyable time in your life! Just keep in mind there may be bumps. Sharing special moments and concerns with your significant other, family, friends and your provider are very important because it builds confidence and bonds with those who will be helping support you through your journey of pregnancy, birth and beyond as you enjoy your new life with your baby. Ask questions and tell stories. Trust that the discomfort of swollen ankles and heartburn will soon be replaced with precious moments shared with your new little one.

If you're going to do some research yourself, please use reputable sources such as the Mayo Clinic, WebMD, Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the March of Dimes. Ask your provider to suggest other resources they trust.

I'd like to end with trusting your intuition. Women are far more in tune with their bodies than many give themselves credit for. If you feel like something is just not right, don't wait for your next appointment. Contact your provider immediately. Best wishes on this exciting journey!