



**Becoming  
a Parent  
Begins During  
Pregnancy**

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# BECOMING A PARENT BEGINS DURING PREGNANCY

Carrying a child can be an exciting and wonderful time when parents prepare for the arrival of a new individual in the family. We care about your pregnancy and therefore present the advice that follows.

## What can I do before I become pregnant?

By providing detailed information about yourself, both you and healthcare professionals are able to make decisions that increase the likelihood of a good outcome for mother and child. Therefore, it is preferred to have an interview with a general practitioner if there are any health problems that require further examination. Diseases such as diabetes, immune diseases, heart and vascular diseases, thyroid problems, high blood pressure, infections and kidney diseases can have an effect during pregnancy. By taking good care of your own health, you can reduce the risk of various complications.

It is important that you familiarise yourself with the health history of your parents and your spouse. Some genetic factors that may influence pregnancy care should be evaluated before or early in pregnancy. Health problems during previous pregnancies, such as preeclampsia, stillbirth or genetic factors may affect this pregnancy. In some cases, genetic counselling may be beneficial.

## Healthy Lifestyle

When you are expecting a child, it's a good opportunity to review your daily habits and consider a healthy lifestyle with the child's wellbeing and health in mind.

Women can prepare for pregnancy by eating a variety of nutritious foods according to official recommendations and taking folate tablets preferably at least a month before pregnancy.

Good nutrition during pregnancy is important for the growth and development of a child in the womb and contributes to its health later in life.

It is no less important for the wellbeing and health of the woman herself and contributes to a reasonable weight gain during pregnancy.

Exercise is an important part of a healthy lifestyle, and so all women should exercise regularly during pregnancy. Appropriate exercise has a positive effect, both for mother and child.

Alcohol, smoking and other drugs easily cross over to the placenta and can have serious consequences for the baby. Pregnant women should not use tobacco or consume alcohol or other drugs. If you find it difficult to stop using these substances or if your partner is using, you should seek advice from a midwife or doctor as soon as possible.

## Pregnancy care

Pregnancy care is open to all expectant mothers/fathers and is free of charge for them. The aim of pregnancy care is to promote the health of mother and child and provide professional care and support. The needs of expectant parents are assessed in each examination, and education and advice are provided as appropriate. We encourage you and your partner to attend the examinations available to you.

## Partner's Support

Your partner plays an important role during pregnancy by providing good support and involvement. It is useful, educational and strengthens the bond formation with the child. Talk about the changes that are happening in your life, feelings and expectations in an honest way.

## Ultrasounds

Prenatal testing is a general search for abnormalities in the foetus, and the probability of chromosomal abnormalities is assessed.

Prenatal testing is done by ultrasound with or without blood testing of the expectant mother. It is not considered harmful to the mother or child.

Prenatal testing is offered at 11–14 weeks and 20 weeks. It is the choice of prospective parents whether they accept prenatal testing.

## Sleep

Adequate sleep is important, and targeted relaxation is effective for increasing wellbeing and reducing discomfort, strain and stress. There is a great health benefit from giving yourself the time you need to sleep and finding ways to reduce stress. During the last trimester of pregnancy, the pressure from the expanding uterus on the adjacent vessels and organs increases. Therefore, it is recommended that a woman sleep on her side because that can improve blood flow through the placenta to the baby. Some women like to have a pillow against their back and stomach to stay on their sides as much as possible during the night.

## Learn to recognise the child's movements

It is fun and interesting to get to know your baby during pregnancy. The mother observes the baby's daily movements, which gives her the opportunity to be in close contact with it. This way, she learns to recognise the child's movement patterns. Each child is unique, and therefore, it is important to know what is normal for the child when it comes to the frequency and pattern of movements. The child should continue to move regularly throughout the pregnancy. The child's movements are the best sign that it is feeling well.

The baby's first movements feel like bubbles or surging in the stomach. Gradually, the mother senses distinct kicks and movements that give her confirmation of the life growing inside her.

Women feel the baby's movements increase up to 32 weeks, but after that, they remain similar throughout the pregnancy. However, the perception of foetal movements changes as it gets closer to birth. The child moves lower in the pelvis and drops, which causes the feeling of its movements to become different. The child takes up more space with its increased size and therefore cannot move its limbs as much.

As the birth approaches, contractions in the uterus increase, which can lead to movements not being felt as well.

If you are uncertain about whether there have been any changes, it can be good to settle down in peace and quiet to assess the child's movements. Notice how long it takes the baby to move ten times. The movements may include kicks or kneading. Hicups are not movement. If you feel ten movements in less than two hours and the child continues to move as usual, then you can rest easy. The use of devices for home use to measure heart rate is not recommended because this is not sufficient to assess the child's wellbeing.

It is always important to listen to your intuition. Although most pregnancies go well, it has been shown that reduced movements of a child can indicate that the child is in trouble. If the child's movements are less than you are used to feeling, then you should talk to a midwife or doctor. Don't wait until tomorrow or for your next maternity care appointment.

In addition to what has been mentioned above, it is important to contact pregnancy care or another healthcare institution if the following symptoms are present:

- Fever, 38.5°C or above
- Vaginal bleeding
- Pain that does not go away with rest or conventional pain management
- Headache that does not go away with rest or conventional pain management
- Discomfort during urination

- Vomiting/nausea, especially associated with pain
- Sudden swelling of the hands, feet or face
- Continuous itching
- Amniotic fluid leakage
- Overwhelming worry that something is wrong

## Where should I go if I have pain or problems during pregnancy?

It is normal for parents to have questions during pregnancy, and there are many places to go to get answers to them.

### **Heilsuvera.is**

On the website of the Healthcare Centre of the Capital Area and the Directorate of Health, there is information about pregnancy, the changes that occur during pregnancy, wellbeing and the complications of pregnancy. There you can find answers to various speculations and worries about pregnancy.

### **Your healthcare centre**

At each healthcare centre, midwives, general practitioners and nurses are available by phone and provide advice, information and answer questions. Many healthcare centres offer weekday afternoon shifts. You can send an inquiry to the midwives and doctors at the healthcare centre through My Pages on Heilsuvera.is.

### **Tel. 1770**

Læknavaktin is open from 17:00–08:00 every weekday and 24 hours a day on weekends. Those who get sick or feel pain and think they need advice and an examination outside of working hours can contact Læknavaktin.

### **Tel. 543-3250**

Emergency service of the women's ward, open outside working hours. From the 28th week of pregnancy, you can contact them due to reduced foetal movements, as well as if vaginal bleeding or amniotic fluid leakage occurs.

### **112 Emergency**

The Emergency Line should always be contacted directly in the event of an emergency, accident or heavy bleeding.

