

Parenting Your Baby Before Birth

General Information

As you enter this new phase in your life, you may have mixed feelings ranging from joy and excitement to fear and anxiety. By understanding pregnancy as the beginning stage of parenting, you may be able to make better decisions in health care for yourself and your baby.

First Trimester

- In the first days of pregnancy, you begin to think of yourself as a different person. You are different. You are a parent!
- In the first 12 weeks, the embryo is developing inside you. By the end of the 12th week, a tiny baby has formed. Although you may barely look pregnant on the outside, the baby's growth inside you causes changes in your body.

Morning sickness or queasiness can occur as your body begins to adapt to the baby's growth. Other physical changes may include:

- Your breasts become fuller and more tender.
- You go to the bathroom more often.
- You have changes in your appetite.
- You may be more tired.
- Your baby causes you to feel new and different emotions such as uncertainty, fear and excitement, and mood swings. Emotional changes occur for your partner as well. You both have changing identities because of the baby.

Second Trimester

- You may be past the point of nausea and beginning to believe, "Yes, I am going to have a baby and I am going to be a parent."
- You may begin to tell people you are pregnant. You might start thinking about changing your schedule and your work or housing arrangements.
- Your clothes don't fit anymore.
- Your baby is learning to adapt to the space in your uterus, and you are learning to adapt to your pregnancy.
- Even before you feel movement, your baby is practicing the skills seen at birth. Your baby moves its arm and legs, sucks on its fingers, floats up and down, and begins to hear sounds from outside your uterus. Your baby hears your voice and the voices of others in your life.
- This is a good time to introduce music to your baby. This is a great time to have your other children talk to the baby inside. This will help them get used to their sibling. After birth, this will have helped the baby learn to adjust to the noises of an older child or other sounds in your life.
- Knowing your body and baby is important during pregnancy. Once movement becomes stronger, you can begin to learn your baby's patterns. When you go to your prenatal visits, you will be able to report when the baby is most active and when there might be a change.

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- Learn to recognize a contraction by placing your hands on your abdomen and feeling when the uterus tightens and releases. This will feel different than when your baby is moving. It is important to learn to know the difference, because baby movements and contractions can feel the same at first.
- Sometimes contractions are the baby's way of telling you to slow down, that you are working too hard or doing too many activities. Your body and your baby give you signals and you need to learn to pay attention to them. This is practice in learning the skills of parenting. You will need to use these same skills after the baby is born. You are already a mother with a baby that needs your care.

Third Trimester

- The last months of pregnancy prepare you for the birth. Your body begins to get more uncomfortable. You have been feeling the movements of the baby, watching the baby move in your abdomen and learning some of the baby's patterns of sleep and awake times. You are now ready to see this baby on the outside.
- The baby is busy, too, continuing the movements of stretching and rolling, and trying to find a comfortable place to settle. If your baby has engaged into your pelvis, you may breathe a little easier and indigestion should decrease, but you are going to the bathroom more often. As your body practices contractions more often, the baby also practices to help in labor, stretching and extending, beginning the journey down the birth canal.

Throughout Your Pregnancy

Here are some suggestions to make your pregnancy more comfortable. Whether you follow all, some or none of these, remember that you and your baby already have a special relationship.

- Take good care of yourself, and you will be taking care of your baby.
- Enjoy this special time with this baby.
- Talk to your baby. Sing to your baby. Read to your baby. These are all ways to connect with your baby.
- Picture your baby floating and being comfortable. Know that you both you and your baby are doing a wonderful job together.
- Learn all you can about the delivery. Begin to consider what you need to labor and birth.
- Believe in yourself and your baby to know how to birth.
- Celebrate the parent that you are and the family you are becoming.