



Epworth

Epworth Maternity

Before the *bump*

Planning for pregnancy





Preparing for parenthood often starts well before you receive a positive pregnancy test.

Deciding to start, or expand your family is a big decision. Some people have lots of time to plan, others have little.

We are here to help your journey from bump to birth, bub and beyond, supporting you from the beginning.

In ***Before the bump***, our Epworth Maternity experts share their expertise and experience to enhance your chances of conceiving a healthy baby.

You'll find out how to fuel your fertility through food, move for maximum benefit and achieve a wellbeing equilibrium.

Preparing for pregnancy can be a rollercoaster ride of emotions and a seemingly endless list of to-dos. That's why we created the ultimate pre-pregnancy checklist – an easy, evidence-based roadmap that sets you up for success.

We also provide you with tips on staying positive during pregnancy setbacks, debunk fertility myths and suggest when you should seek help.

By the time you are pregnant, you'll be ready to enjoy the exciting journey ahead.

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Your fertility fitness

Check ups: From head to toe

For some people becoming pregnant will be a sprint. For others, it's a marathon. Regardless of the race you run, your first port of call should always be your trusted general practitioner (GP).

GP health check

Whether you have the luxury of time to plan, or you've just discovered you are pregnant, it's important to get a health check from your regular doctor.

Your GP visit can cover off:

- > General health, such as weight, blood pressure and any cervical abnormalities
- > Family medical history and whether this plays any part in fertility, and your ability to have a healthy baby
- > Any vaccinations you need before conceiving
- > How to get a genetic carrier screen to check if you or your partner carry genes that could cause health problems for your baby
- > Any lifestyle issues or health problems you or your partner may wish to seek help with before starting your family
- > Any environmental factors that may pose a risk during pregnancy.

Dental health

It's wise to get your gums and teeth checked out before you conceive. Dental treatment before pregnancy can reduce the risk of premature birth and pregnant women are advised not to have X-rays, where possible.

Breast check

All women should examine their breasts for lumps regularly. If you feel anything unusual or notice any changes, talk to your doctor. A screening mammogram is recommended for all women aged 50 to 74. Women aged 40-49 and those over 74 can also be screened free of charge.

If you do feel that something isn't right, talk to your GP or you can make an appointment at the [Breast Clinic at Epworth Freemasons](#).

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs)

Ideally, any STIs should be treated before pregnancy. You can discuss tests and treatments with your GP.

Mental health

If you have a diagnosed mental health condition, please discuss your pregnancy plans with your medical team, who can help support you with this journey. Some expectant parents find that any pre-existing mental health conditions can be magnified during pregnancy and with a newborn. Epworth has mental

health experts and can also recommend contacting organisations like [PANDA](#) and [Beyond Blue](#), for support.

Medicines and medical conditions

Before you get pregnant, talk to your GP about any medications you are taking. Your GP can tell you how these may affect you and your baby during pregnancy and devise a safe treatment plan.

Fuelling your fertility with food

Adopting healthy habits help prime your body for pregnancy.

When preparing to conceive, there is no better time for you and your partner to start eating a balanced diet. The choices you make now can have significant and long-lasting benefits for you and your baby.



Top tips: *What to indulge in*

- > A wide variety of plant based products, including vegetables (of different types and colours), fruits, nuts, seeds and wholegrains to boost beneficial antioxidants.
- > Fresh unprocessed food instead of processed foods with additives such as salt and sugar.
- > Complex, low GI, high fibre carbohydrates from wholegrains, vegetables, nuts and seeds.
- > Plant based proteins, such as legumes and pulses, as well as lean meat, poultry and fish.
- > Seafood, which some research has linked to increased fertility.
- > Iodine rich foods such as seafood, seaweed (nori), potatoes, cranberries, strawberries, iodised salt and our bread supply, which is fortified.
- > Full fat dairy products, such as milk and yoghurt.
- > Unsaturated vegetable oils – particularly extra virgin olive oil.

Some studies suggest that shifting towards an earlier eating pattern, with a larger breakfast and lunch and a smaller evening meal with reduced late-night eating, may improve fertility.

Top tips: *What to avoid*

- > It's recommended you reduce your alcohol intake while you are trying to become pregnant. There is no known safe level of alcohol consumption during pregnancy.
- > You don't need to forgo your daily coffee, although if you're trying to conceive it is a good idea not to overdo the caffeine. Some studies suggest a large intake (more than 500mg of caffeine per day) of coffee and tea can increase the time it takes to get pregnant.
- > Quitting smoking and stopping illicit drug use is also recommended if you are trying to conceive.
- > Swap out trans fats for mono and omega 3 poly-unsaturated fats. This means less processed and fried foods, commercially-prepared baked products and margarines.
- > Reduce processed meat intake.
- > Cut out refined carbohydrates found in sweet drinks, lollies, cakes, biscuits, desserts, and refined products, such as white bread, rice and cereals. Instead opt for lower GI alternatives. You might find some inspiration from one of our Epworth dieticians, [here](#).
- > Energy drinks – it's no surprise that they don't do us any fertility favours.

Supplements

If you are trying to get pregnant, you might like to consider taking a folate supplement from the time you start thinking about conceiving – ideally three months before conception – through to at least the first 12 weeks of pregnancy.

Folate is a B-group vitamin that is essential for your baby's brain and spinal cord development in the first few weeks of pregnancy. If your baby's neural tube doesn't develop, they can be born with a birth defect, such as spina bifida.

It's beneficial to try to get these nutrients from food sources and always speak to your doctor or dietician before considering a supplement.

Exercise is an elixir

Staying active through exercise has so many benefits for you, your partner and your baby.

It releases feel-good endorphins that can help de-stress. It helps keep your weight in check, which increases your chance of conception.

To strike the right balance, opt for regular bursts of moderate exercise, rather than overdoing the intensity.

It's recommended that you undertake around 30 minutes of moderate intensity exercise on most days of the week.

A healthy weight is great

To enhance your chances of conceiving, aim to achieve a healthy weight. If you are underweight, or overweight, studies show you may find it harder to conceive.

It's also important to maintain a healthy weight during pregnancy to reduce the risk of premature birth and pregnancy complications.

There is plenty of support for couples who are trying to increase their chance of conceiving through lifestyle changes. You can consult a nutritionist, dietitian, exercise physiologist or physiotherapist. A great place to start is at your GP, who can refer you to the appropriate specialist.



Debunking pregnancy myths

> Only a woman's age matters when it comes to conceiving.

MYTH: Both men and women have a biological clock that keeps ticking as they age. Parents-to-be who are older are likely to find it takes longer to conceive and have a higher risk of complications.

> The average couple becomes pregnant after three months of trying to conceive.

MYTH: It takes up to 12 months for the average Australian couple to conceive.

> You can conceive at any time of the month.

MYTH: A woman's fertile window usually occurs in the first five days before ovulation through to the day of ovulation (when the eggs is released into the ovary and is ready to meet the sperm). For most women, their cycle is 28 days and ovulation happens on day 14, however, this varies between women and depends on the length of their cycle.

> Taking the contraceptive pill for too long can make it harder to become pregnant.

MYTH: While it may take a few months for your cycle to resume its normal pattern, there is no evidence to show that taking the pill reduces your fertility.



> You can't get pregnant while you are breastfeeding.

MYTH: Even though breastfeeding can delay your period resuming after giving birth, there is still a chance you can become pregnant again.

> You can determine the gender of your baby by having sex in a particular position, timing your conception correctly, or by eating or drinking certain foods.

MYTH: There is no evidence that any of these factors will influence the gender of your unborn baby.

Why age matters

Women

When it comes to fertility, age is not just a number. The older you get, the harder it is to get pregnant naturally. Women are born with all the eggs they will ever have – and your eggs age along with you. The chances of falling pregnant are highest for women under 35 years of age but every woman's journey is different, and you have no doubt heard of many women having babies in their late 30s and 40s.

It's important to consider that by the age of 40, a woman's chance of getting pregnant drops around five per cent each month.

Talk to your GP about age-related fertility options, such as assisted reproductive treatments such as IVF (in-vitro fertilisation). Even though it's early days, your Epworth Maternity team is here to help

Men

The pregnancy spotlight may be focused largely on women, but men's fertility plays a big role too. The quality of a man's sperm starts to slide around 40 to 45 years of age, reducing the chance of conceiving – and having a healthy baby.

Male infertility may also be due to other issues and your GP can advise you on options for testing.

Having trouble conceiving?

You are not alone – conception is truly a miracle! At Epworth, we understand that for many couples, it's not an easy journey. In fact, one in six Australian couples are unable to become pregnant after one year of unprotected sex.

Nutrition and lifestyle can have a positive effect on fertility, and may improve your chances of having a baby by up to 69 per cent.

But if you're still having trouble, a good place for both men and women to start is with your GP.

If you are over 35

If you are finding it difficult to conceive, it can be overwhelming and put a strain on your relationship.

Your GP can refer you to fertility specialists and support services to help you and your partner during this challenging time.

Knowing when to seek additional support is important. A visit to your GP could be beneficial for women under 35 who haven't conceived after 12 months of trying. For women over 35, it's recommended they seek help after six months.

Your whole world shifts

Life is set to change in a big and wonderful way! So getting your life administration in order now can save you some stress down the track.

Top tips for preparing for pregnancy and becoming a parent

Maternity and paternity leave:

Find out what paid entitlements both you and your partner can claim from your employer and the government, and if you can tap into annual and long-service leave. If you are self-employed, it's a good time to consider how much time you can practically take off work. Have you decided how you will parent your child, particularly in those early years?

Baby budget:

There can be hidden costs when it comes to having a baby, such as medical care and tests, birthing classes, nappies and childcare. It's wise to draw up a budget now. Also, thinking about how big you ideally want your family to be can help with financial planning.

Private versus public:

It may seem premature to start thinking about which hospital you'd like to support you through this journey. But if you think you'd like to give birth in a

private hospital like Epworth, benefits include private rooms, first class care and access to a luxury hotel experience. It's worth looking into private health cover and ensuring that you have obstetric care within your policy. If you do not have private health insurance, you also have the option of self insuring your hospital stay. Contact our Maternity team if you would like to discuss your options or book a tour of our facilities.

Become a bookworm:

It's never too early to start reading up on what to expect, even before you are expecting. Ask your GP or our Maternity team to recommend useful and trusted resources to help you prepare for this life-changing journey. Keep in mind that not all information online is from experts or relevant to your personal circumstances.



If you are considering having a baby then make sure you contact us for a copy of our exclusive book, **Bump, Birth & Bub** by Epworth Maternity.



Mobile Midwife videos have been produced by your Epworth Maternity team and contain useful, short videos on topics from self-care, exercise and nutrition, to helpful information on caring for your newborn when the time arrives.

Going it alone?

Families come in all shapes and sizes, and conceiving without a partner can feel overwhelming. You are in good company though, with rising numbers of people having a baby solo, by choice or otherwise. A good support network can make a huge difference though and there are a myriad single parenting groups and forums to connect to – both in your community and online. Epworth is proudly inclusive and is here to support you every step of the way.



Mental health and wellbeing



How to boost your mental health before the bump

Your mental health is just as important as your physical health when it comes to planning for parenthood. The journey is going to be full of twists and turns and it's understandable if you are worried.

Focusing on boosting your mental wellbeing now will give you the best chance of coping with the changes and challenges ahead. Tips include regular exercise and a healthy diet, spending time with positive, supportive people, avoiding alcohol and drugs to cope with stress, and reading evidence-based information from trusted sources.

What to do if you have a pre-existing mental illness

The best thing you can do is talk to your GP and mental health provider, and let them know you are trying for a baby. Pregnancy can be an emotional rollercoaster for many women and men. But with the right support and treatment, your condition can be managed during pregnancy – and beyond.

Understanding risk of developing antenatal anxiety and depression

It's normal to experience waves of conflicting emotions during pregnancy, from joy and excitement to mood swings, anxiety and stress. When these feelings are prolonged and start to overwhelm

your daily life, you may have antenatal anxiety or depression. One in five expecting mums experience one of these conditions, as do one in 20 fathers-to-be. The good news is that they are fleeting and treatable with the right help and support. Be aware of the signs, and get help as early as possible through your GP and organisations like [PANDA](#) (Perinatal Anxiety & Depression Australia), which have helpful checklists that help you determine if you may need additional support. We know that the earlier you receive help, the more likely you are to recover quickly.

How to stay positive and reduce stress during pregnancy setbacks

Feeling angry, frustrated and sad when your dream of conceiving hits a brick wall? Be kind to yourself – this is an entirely natural response. Stress can have an impact on your fertility, so working out how to stay mentally strong during this time will be beneficial. It hasn't worked out this time, but it can take years for some people to conceive. Again, a good diet and regular exercise will go a long way to a healthy mindset, as will mindfulness techniques, such as yoga and meditation.

Your ultimate pre-pregnancy checklist

- ❑ Get fertility fit: Adopt a healthy and balanced diet to optimise your chances of conceiving, cut out alcohol and stop smoking.
- ❑ Start taking at least 500mg of folic acid daily to ensure your baby's brain and spinal cord develops normally.
- ❑ Aim to engage in moderate exercise of 30 minutes on most days of the week and take steps to achieve a healthy weight.
- ❑ Book an appointment with your GP for a pre-pregnancy health check.
- ❑ Understand the role of genetic carrier screening, in case you want to know your risk of having a baby with certain conditions that may limit their quality of life and lifespan.
- ❑ Consider booking in for one of our other recommended head
- to toe health checks, such as a dentist appointment, which are listed in **Before the bump**.
- ❑ Get mentally fit: Focus on developing a positive mindset to prepare for the changes ahead.
- ❑ Explore the differences between having your baby in the private and public system.
- ❑ Ensure your private health insurance covers you for obstetrics and gynaecology and if there are any waiting periods on the cover.
- ❑ Understand the type of parental leave entitlements you may be able to access through your employer and look into other financial supports that may be available for you and your family.
- ❑ Speak to your Epworth Maternity team.

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Epworth Maternity
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Contact Us

Epworth Freemasons

Level 2, 320 Victoria Parade
East Melbourne Victoria 3002

109 Albert Street
East Melbourne Victoria 3002

Phone 03 9418 8333

Fax 03 9418 8163

Maternity Concierge

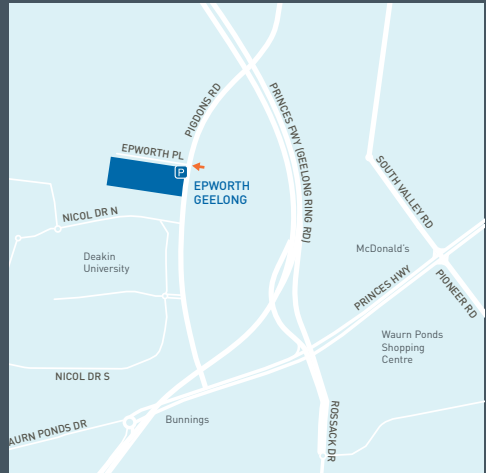
Phone 03 9418 8300

– select option one

Epworth Geelong

Level 3, 1 Epworth Place
Waurun Ponds Victoria 3216

Phone 03 5271 8322



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