



Epworth

Epworth Maternity

Ask an Epworth *midwife*

Your guide to early pregnancy





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This information is intended to be used as a guide of general nature, having regard to general circumstances. The information presented should not be relied on as a substitute for medical advice, independent judgement or proper assessment by a doctor, with consideration of the particular circumstances of each case and individual needs. This information reflects information available at the time of publication.

From the moment you discover that you're pregnant, a sense of excitement and anticipation sets in. You may also feel a little bit worried about what lies ahead. Often, you'll feel like you have more questions than answers.

**How do I cope with morning sickness?
When should I tell people I'm pregnant?
What foods should I avoid?
Is it safe to dye my hair?**

Fortunately, the Epworth Maternity experience means that you have your own set of renowned experts on hand to help you. No question is too big, or too small.

We tailor our advice to your individual needs, drawing on the latest evidence and more than 100 years of experience supporting Victorian families from bump to baby and beyond.

In this guide to early pregnancy we share our insights into how to have a healthy pregnancy and answer all your frequently asked questions. We also help you understand the support systems we have in place to guide you on your pregnancy journey.



I think I'm pregnant – what next?

Congratulations! This is such an exciting time for you and your family. To confirm your pregnancy, buy a pregnancy test from a pharmacy or supermarket. It measures the pregnancy hormone in your urine and most tests are sensitive enough to detect it on the first day your period is due.

The next step is to make an appointment with your general practitioner (GP) to confirm the pregnancy and have a check-up. Your GP will also discuss the type of pregnancy care and maternity experience that's best suited to you and your family needs.

During this appointment you can ask your GP to make a booking with an Epworth accredited obstetrician. By choosing Epworth Maternity, you're ensuring your family receives a first-class experience backed by extensive clinical expertise.

You can relax and be reassured that you'll be guaranteed a private room in a hospital with state-of-the-art facilities and the highest level of safety and support for you and your little one. Best of all, our trusted team of experts offer around the clock care, support and advice that begins from the moment you make your booking with us.

> I've had a positive pregnancy test. When should I share my happy news?

You're probably bursting to tell friends and family the exciting news, so when is it appropriate to share it? It's a very personal decision, but it's worth considering that miscarriage is most common in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy. That's why many people wait until the three month mark until they announce their pregnancy. Some parents-to-be choose to tell a few close family members or friends in the first trimester, in case they need emotional support or help with morning sickness.

> When should I tell my employer I'm pregnant?

The timing for letting your boss know you're pregnant is an entirely individual decision. Depending on your job and employer, it may be a conversation you're dreading or putting off because you're worried about the impact on your career. Rest assured, it's unlikely you're the first person to approach them with this news. Equally, there are laws and guidelines to protect you against any discrimination or inequality during pregnancy – and when you return to work.

Your employer may also be able to support you during early pregnancy by adjusting your tasks to your new situation or providing you with leave for medical appointments.

When it comes time to tell your employer, it's best to check the requirements for applying for paid parental leave. If you haven't already done so, also find out what paid entitlements both you and your partner can claim from your employer and the government, and whether or not you can tap into annual and long-service leave. If you're self-employed, consider how much time you can practically take off work. You might also consider what child-care arrangements you may need in those early years, and how long you plan to stay at home to care for your baby.

> When will my baby be due?

Once your pregnancy is confirmed, the countdown to your due date begins. An unborn baby spends around 38 weeks in the womb, but the average pregnancy is 40 weeks. It can be tricky to pinpoint your due date on your own, but pregnancy is usually counted from the first day of your last period, not the date of conception, which usually occurs later.

Your GP, obstetrician or midwife can help you pinpoint your due date with more accuracy. If there is any uncertainty, you can have an ultrasound.

> **Can I still dye my hair when I am pregnant?**

Scientific studies into hair dye use during pregnancy are scant. Most hair dyes are considered safe, but if you'd like to err on the side of caution you could avoid using these products in the first trimester, dye your hair in a well ventilated room to avoid fumes, or go to the hairdresser instead of using home dye. If you have any queries or concerns, ask your medical team for advice.

> **What are the most important ways I can start planning for my baby's arrival at this early stage?**

If you like to plan ahead, you may already be thinking about how to get you and your home ready for your baby and even planning your first trip to a baby store.

At this early stage, one of the best things to start thinking about is the practical set up of your home. Consider things like where your baby is going to sleep, where you will change nappies and bathe your newborn, and ways to baby-proof your home.

The baby gear you'll need will constantly evolve as your little one grows. But the most important equipment you'll need include a rear-facing child car seat that meets Australian/New Zealand Standard AS/NZS 1754, an Australian Standards-approved cot, and a firm, well-fitting mattress and sheets.

Review scientifically-backed information on safe sleep practices [here](#).

Is it ever too early to pack your hospital bag? While we recommend having your essential items ready by the 35 week mark of your pregnancy, we know that many people like to plan ahead. Read our guide to packing the perfect hospital bag [here](#).

The costs of a new baby can quickly add up, especially big ticket items like prams, so consider turning to friends and family for hand-me-downs and to borrow any baby gear.

If you'd like to start learning how to care for your body and baby after birth, watch our [Mobile Midwife series](#), which includes a special section on preparing for labour.



As a part of the Epworth Maternity experience you'll also receive exclusive access to our maternity education program designed by our midwives and obstetricians. Learn more about Epworth childbirth education [here](#) or contact our Maternity Liaison Officer at Epworth Freemasons on **03 9418 8300**.

You may want to consider how you will capture the remarkable transformation that your body will undergo during pregnancy and start planning the perfect way to preserve those first precious moments with your newborn. The preferred photographer at Epworth Freemasons is [Bella Fresh48](#),

who works closely with our maternity team and is available for free, in hospital sessions, with no obligation to purchase. You can also arrange a photoshoot at home and we highly recommend registering early to avoid disappointment.

You can also join thousands of Victorian families and stay connected with the Epworth community online.



**Instagram @
Epworthbabies**



**Epworth Maternity
Facebook Group**

> **Do I need a maternity bra, and when should I get fitted?**

Every woman is different – and you may choose not to even wear a bra during pregnancy, depending on the size of your breasts. But as a rule of thumb, most changes in your breasts have usually happened by around the four month mark, as your body prepares for potential breastfeeding. That’s a good time to go hunting for a maternity bra, and we recommend getting professionally fitted to give you the best support.

> **When will my baby bump ‘pop out’?**

You will start to show between 12-16 weeks – although you may notice it before others, as you’ll be on bump watch!

> **How can I maintain a positive body image during pregnancy?**

Your body will undergo many changes to support the beautiful life growing inside you, from a growing belly and weight gain to bigger breasts, fluid retention and swelling, visible veins and acne-prone skin. Every woman’s experiences will be different, but for many, these changes throw up body image challenges.



Remember – weight gain is normal as your body creates a healthy home for your little one on this wonderful journey to parenthood. Try to embrace the changes, get rid of your scales and avoid comparing yourself to others on social media or in magazines.

If you’re overweight, your GP will be able to provide you with lifestyle changes and medical advice tailored to your situation. Equally, if you struggled with unhealthy body image issues or an eating disorder prior to pregnancy, it’s important to get support during your pregnancy.

> **I’m worried I’m going to end up in hospital with severe morning sickness like the Duchess of Cambridge Kate Middleton. How common is that?**

Hyperemesis gravidarum causes severe nausea and vomiting. But rest assured, it only affects about 1-3 per cent of pregnancies, so your chance of experiencing this is low. One of the biggest risk factors is a family history.

> **I am constantly hungry. Is that normal?**

Your body is working incredibly hard during pregnancy, so it’s no wonder you’re always heading to the pantry. Not only is your blood volume increasing by as much as 50 per cent, an incredible little human is growing in your uterus.

Further down the track, your body will be preparing a milk supply ready for the potential to breastfeed. All of this requires significant energy (read: calories) and it’s no surprise that this will increase your hunger levels.

If you want to get scientific, changes to hormone levels, particularly oestrogen, progesterone and gonadotropin (also known as hCG – human chorionic gonadotropin), can also drive an increase in appetite during pregnancy.

It’s important to honour this change, listen to your body and feed it with a variety of foods to keep you and baby nourished throughout the day.

For some women, their appetite may actually decrease. This can be related to morning sickness, food aversions (a strong dislike for particular foods) and changes to taste and smell.

> **When should I start performing pelvic floor exercises?**

The pelvic floor is a group of muscles and ligaments that support the bladder, uterus and bowel. Pregnancy and labour put pressure on the pelvic floor. By strengthening your pelvic floor muscles you can reduce the risk of incontinence and prolapse after labour. Just a few minutes a day can have lifelong benefits. To learn how to strengthen your pelvic floor visit [**Pelvic Floor First**](#).

> What are cravings and why do we get them?

Weird and wonderful cravings are a common part of pregnancy, and are likely to be caused by a range of factors:

- 1 Rapidly changing hormones (including hCG that can alter our taste buds).
- 2 Changes in your body's physiology. As your body is growing another human and producing a lot more blood, your need for energy and nutrients may change.
- 3 Your body may be looking for particular nutrients or food elements. This might include sodium, if you find yourself craving salty foods, or a quick hit of energy if you're reaching for the carbs.
- 4 Certain foods may provide comfort as your body (and world) changes!

Note: if you develop cravings or an overwhelming desire to consume non-food substances, you may be experiencing a condition known as pica. It is very important to seek medical attention immediately.

> Am I having a boy or a girl?

It's one of the most common questions you will be asked during your pregnancy. Some parents-to-be prefer to wait until the birth of their baby to find out, while others are keen to know their baby's gender from the get-go.

The gender of the baby can be determined at the ultrasound in the second trimester (usually performed between 18-20 weeks), although it is not always 100 per cent accurate.

The Non-Invasive Prenatal Test (NIPT) is a blood test that can check for common chromosomal or genetic conditions anytime after 10 weeks and three days into a pregnancy. This optional prenatal screening test can also determine the gender of your baby with 99 per cent accuracy, if you wish.

For more information about the test, please speak to your GP or obstetrician who can provide you with expert advice.

> Is sex safe during pregnancy?

Your sexual appetite may increase or decrease during pregnancy and you may need to explore new ways to be intimate as your baby bump grows. However, you and your partner can be reassured that sex is safe during pregnancy.



Bump friendly nutrition

A healthy, nutritious diet is one of the best ways to help both mum and bub prosper through pregnancy and beyond. But many women find they don't feel like eating the foods they enjoyed pre-bump.

If you're taking your prenatal supplement, you can relax a little knowing this will be providing you and your developing baby with key nutrients. This can help when your appetite, taste buds and symptoms (including pesky morning sickness!) are changing, and it becomes a struggle to stick to your normal diet.

If your appetite and energy levels allow, try to:

- > Opt for complex, low GI, high fibre carbohydrates from whole grains, vegetables, nuts and seeds.
- > Consume 300-450 grams per week of lower mercury fish and seafood. Examples that are high in omega-3 fats include sardines, silver warehou, Atlantic salmon, canned salmon, and herrings.
- > Boost your intake of plant-based products including vegetables, fruits, nuts, seeds and wholegrains to reap the benefits from antioxidants.
- > Include some red meat (1-2 serves per week) for valuable iron if you can.



What to avoid:

- > Foods like soft cheeses, refrigerated paté, processed meats and raw and undercooked fish, meat, poultry and eggs.
- > Unpasteurised juices, cider or milk.
- > Pre-packaged or prepared salads and fruit, and raw sprouts.
- > Alcohol: The safest thing for your baby is to not drink at all. If you have concerns about alcohol consumption, particularly if you were drinking before you knew you were pregnant, it's best to speak to your obstetrician or midwife.
- > Smoking: Contact the Quitline on **137 848** for support giving up smoking.
- > Mercury: In high doses it may harm a developing baby's brain. Limit your intake of orange roughy (sea perch), catfish, shark (flake) or billfish (swordfish/broadbill and marlin) to 150grams per week, and ensure you have no other fish that week.
- > Sushi: Check if the raw fish has been frozen previously. It's generally safe if it has been previously frozen, and is from a source that you trust. But if raw fish hasn't been previously frozen, it may contain small parasitic worms, called anisakis worms. And if the rice is a day old, there is a risk of salmonella and listeria.
- > Vitamin A: Any topical creams, ointments, serums which contain vitamin A or vitamin A derivatives.

- > Keep hydrated. As your blood volume increases and your body is producing more fluid for you and your developing baby, your fluid needs may also increase. Pregnant and breastfeeding women may need an additional 750-1000ml fluid per day, so aiming for 9 cups per day is a good target.
- > Fibre is your friend. Rising levels of progesterone in pregnancy can slow down the passage of food through your digestive tract. This leaves pregnant women more at risk of constipation. Combine this with changes in diet (possibly eating less vegetables, fruits and grains) and add in iron supplements, and your risk of constipation may grow.
- > As well as keeping your fluids up, include fresh vegetables, fruit, whole grains, legumes, nuts and seeds for fibre. Swap out white bread and crackers for grainy varieties, and include the skins and seeds from fruits and vegetables that you've washed well. Speak to your medical team about fibre supplements or laxatives if you need a little extra help!

> What's the rule of thumb for safe foods when you're out and about?

If it's food that has sat in the fridge for a while since it was prepared, avoid it! This includes ready-made salads, fruit salads, pre-prepared sandwiches and meals, soft serve ice cream or dairy desserts.

If in doubt, don't eat it. And if you accidentally eat something that poses a risk, move on. The likelihood it will cause any harm is slim and we can't change the past. It's important that we look after our psychological health as well as our physical.

> Finding it hard to get a bump-friendly lunch when out? Here are our top tips for lunch

- > Leftovers: reheat until scorching hot, and eat within 24hrs.
- > Pre-prepared frozen meals: heat until scorching hot, never let thaw and don't refreeze.
- > Sandwiches and wraps.
- > Freshly prepared salads with cooked chicken, turkey, tuna, hardboiled egg and falafels.

- > Eggs on toast with cooked mushrooms, tomatoes, spinach and avocado.
- > Soups with plenty of veggies, e.g. minestrone, lamb and vegetable, chicken and vegetable, served with whole grain toast or roll. Tinned/ canned or pre-packaged soups are convenient options.
- > Toasted sandwiches made with whole grain bread, chicken or turkey, spinach, mushrooms, tomato and cheese.
- > Wholemeal tortilla with four bean mix, corn, spinach, tomato, capsicum, avocado and salsa cooked in the sandwich press with grated cheese.



> **Bump-friendly exercise**

Staying active during pregnancy is a great way to prepare for the physical and mental demands of labour.

We recommend trying to engage in 30 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise on most days of the week. Or, you can aim for 10,000 steps a day, or 150 minutes of exercise over a week.

It's also important to remember that your body will change as your baby grows. Your heart is already working harder to increase your blood supply. The volume of your blood will also increase.

While moderate, safe levels of exercise will not harm your baby, we recommend discussing your exercise plans with your GP, obstetrician or physiotherapist.

If you have medical or obstetric complications, or feel unwell while undertaking exercise, please seek medical advice tailored to your situation. Discover more on staying active with [Mobile Midwife](#).

Embrace:

- > Moderate intensity exercise, such as: walking, static cycling, clinical Pilates, swimming, gentle resistance training and water aerobics.
- > Drinking water before, during and after exercise.
- > Wearing lightweight clothing.
- > Exercising in a cool ventilated space.
- > Pelvic floor exercises.
- > Rest and sleep. Many women find they feel tired during pregnancy.

Avoid:

- > High impact and intense exercises.
- > Activities that raise your core temperature, such as hot yoga and saunas. Overheating can be dangerous during pregnancy.
- > After 16 weeks, avoid exercises where you lay on your back, or sleeping on your back in the second half of your pregnancy.
- > Abdominal crunches or sit ups.
- > Becoming overheated or dehydrated.
- > Exercise that puts pressure on your joints or puts you at risk of collision, tripping or falling, or heavy body contact.

> Bump-friendly tips for staying mentally fit

The early days of pregnancy can trigger a swirl of emotions for both parents, from joy and excitement to anxiety, fear and uncertainty. It can be even harder for those with pre-existing mental health issues like depression and anxiety. That's why it's important to boost your mental fitness from the very beginning, to hold you in good stead for the emotional ups and downs of pregnancy.

Stress can also impact on the health of your growing bub, so we recommend self-care tips including:

- > Mindfulness techniques like meditation and yoga.
- > Ensure you get plenty of sleep.
- > Exercise every day to get those feel good endorphins flowing (see bump-friendly exercise).
- > Talk to friends and family about any worries you have.
- > Seek help as early as you can from your GP if periods of feeling depressed or anxious drag on.

For those struggling with mental health issues, it's best to contact your GP and let your care team at Epworth know, so you can be properly supported.

> The lowdown on morning sickness

Morning sickness is experienced by about half to two-thirds of all pregnant women and for some, it may last well into pregnancy.

Persistent or severe nausea and vomiting may cause dehydration and electrolyte imbalances, so it's important to let your doctor know if you're struggling to keep food or fluids down. There are a number of prescription medications that are safe to take during pregnancy for nausea and vomiting.

Your doctor will recommend a safe option, based on the severity of your symptoms. Be sure to check with your doctor before taking any other medications, herbal remedies or supplements during pregnancy.

> Top tips for coping with morning sickness

- > Aim for small, frequent meals and snacks rather than big meals. For some women, nausea is worse when your stomach is empty.
- > Keep dry biscuits, corn thins or rice cakes at your bedside to snack on before you get up in the morning, to help to settle the stomach.
- > Select foods that are high in protein, low in fat and easy to digest. Try to avoid fatty, greasy or spicy foods.
- > Bland, starchy carbohydrate-based foods such as bread/toast, pasta, rice, bananas may be easier to tolerate.
- > Ginger may help – try teas, broths with fresh or dried ginger, sip on ginger ale or suck on hard lollies. Speak with your doctor or dietician if you're keen to try ginger supplements.
- > Drink plenty of fluids across the day.
- > Avoid food smells if these make you feel unwell.
- > Take your prenatal vitamins before bed at night if they exacerbate your nausea during the day.
- > Take care of your teeth – avoid brushing your teeth after vomiting as this can damage your tooth enamel. Instead, rinse your mouth with water or chew sugar-free gum to promote saliva flow to neutralise the acid.
- > Fresh air, gentle exercise and mindfulness activities may also help.
- > Speak with your doctor if you're interested in trying acupuncture, acupressure, aromatherapy or other complementary/alternative therapies.



> Proudly inclusive, our commitment to you

At Epworth Maternity we provide a supportive, safe and inclusive environment for people of all cultures and backgrounds. This includes lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ+) people, patients, families and visitors. To find out more, visit [our website](#).

> Common early pregnancy concerns and complications

Early pregnancy can be a worrying time, especially if you have been waiting for a long time to conceive.

There are a range of early pregnancy complications that can occur in the first 20 weeks of pregnancy. Up to one in five women miscarry before 20 weeks with most occurring in the first 12 weeks. This usually occurs if the pregnancy is not going to be viable. Some of the warning signs are cramping or period-like pain and vaginal bleeding. If you think you're having a miscarriage, please contact your GP or obstetrician. The loss of a baby at any stage of pregnancy can be a sad and distressing time. There is support and information available to help you and your family during this challenging time, including 24 hour telephone support from [Sands](#).

It's important to know that bleeding in early pregnancy is common and many women who experience this will go on to have healthy babies, however it should still be investigated by your medical team to ensure any potential complications can be detected and treated.

> Who should I call if I am concerned?

If you're ever unsure about your wellbeing or that of your baby, please contact your obstetrician or GP. If it is an emergency, please call 000, or attend your nearest Emergency Department.

Early pregnancy *checklist*

- Confirm your pregnancy by making an appointment with your GP.
- Explore the different options for childbirth with your GP. If you choose an Epworth-accredited obstetrician they will make a booking on your behalf.
- Adopt a healthy diet and stay active, our expert advice is a great place to start.
- Check your private health cover to ensure you're covered for obstetrics and dependent children. Our Maternity Liaison Officer can help, see contact details on the back page of this booklet.
- Decide when you would like to share your pregnancy news with family, friends and your employers.
- Look into maternity and paternity leave entitlements.
- Book a tour of the beautiful, state-of-the-art facilities at Epworth Maternity.
- Book in for your exclusive education classes designed by our midwifery team.
- Join our online community on Facebook and Instagram and start connecting with likeminded parents and our Epworth experts.



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