

Things to know about pregnancy for first-time moms

There are some things that your body may do or experience that you may not know about if you've never been pregnant before. Here are a few things to know about for first-time moms:

- **Spider veins (they're only temporary):** Spider veins are tiny, thin veins that show through your skin. These show up during pregnancy because more blood is circulating through your veins, but they're typically harmless and temporary!
- **Itchy belly:** You may experience an itchy belly, but don't worry. That's usually only because your skin is expanding.
- **Very vivid dreams:** While pregnant, you might experience various emotions – even heightened ones – which can lead to your brain trying to sort through those feelings through vivid dreams.
- **Early lactation can happen:** you start producing breast milk during pregnancy, so it's totally normal to have early lactation before giving birth.
- **Changes in sex drive:** Pregnancy causes a change in hormones and emotions, which can, in turn, cause a change in your sex drive, but don't worry, this is common.

When to Seek Help

Even if you're very careful and healthy, problems can still arise. Seek medical care right away if you experience any of the following symptoms:

- A headache that won't go away or gets worse over time.
- Blurred vision.
- Chest pain or a fast heartbeat.
- Difficulty breathing.
- Dizziness or feeling faint.
- Extreme swelling in your hands and face.
- Fever above 38°C.
- Leaking large amounts of clear fluid from the vagina.
- Reduced fetal movements.
- Swelling, redness, or warmth in one leg.
- Thoughts of harming yourself.
- Unusual or severe cramps.
- Vaginal bleeding.
- Vomiting that lasts more than 24 hours.

Your antenatal appointments

You'll have a number of antenatal appointments during your pregnancy, and you'll see a midwife or sometimes an obstetrician (doctor specializing in pregnancy).

They'll check the health of you and your baby, give you useful information and answer any questions.

Pregnant employees have the right to paid time off for antenatal care.

This page lists the appointments you'll be offered and when you should have them.

If you're pregnant with your first baby, you'll have more appointments than those already with children.

Starting your antenatal (pregnancy) care

You should have your first midwife appointment before you're 10 weeks pregnant where possible. If you're more than 10 weeks pregnant, you should still refer yourself to start your pregnancy care as soon as possible.

You do not need to tell a GP you're pregnant unless you're taking medicine or have a long-term health condition. If you're registered with a GP, they'll be told about your pregnancy after your first midwife appointment.

Find out about [health things you should know in pregnancy](#), including taking folic acid.

Screening for sickle cell disease and thalassemia should be offered before 10 weeks.

This is so you can find out about all your options and make an informed decision if your baby has a chance of inheriting these conditions.

It's important to tell your midwife or doctor if:

- there were any complications or infections in a previous pregnancy or delivery, such as pre-eclampsia or premature birth
- you're being treated for a long-term condition, such as diabetes or high blood pressure
- you or anyone in your family has previously had a baby with a health condition (for example, spina bifida)
- there's a family history of an inherited condition (for example, sickle cell or cystic fibrosis)
- you know that you're a genetic carrier of an inherited condition such as sickle cell or thalassemia – you should also tell the midwife if you know the baby's biological father is a genetic carrier of these conditions
- you have had [fertility treatment](#) and either a donor egg or donor sperm

8 to 12 weeks: booking appointment

It's best to see your midwife or doctor as early as possible to get the information you need to have a healthy pregnancy.

Some tests, such as screening for sickle cell and thalassemia, should be done before you're 10 weeks pregnant.

Your midwife or doctor should give you information about:

- how the baby develops during pregnancy
- nutrition and diet
- exercise and pelvic floor exercises
- antenatal screening tests
- your antenatal care
- breastfeeding, including workshops
- antenatal education
- maternity benefits
- your options for where to have your baby

Your midwife or doctor should:

- give you your handheld notes and plan of care
- see if you may need additional care or support
- plan the care you'll get throughout your pregnancy
- identify any potential risks associated with any work you may do
- measure your height and weight, and calculate your [body mass index \(BMI\)](#)
- measure your blood pressure and test your urine for protein
- find out whether you're at increased risk of gestational diabetes or pre-eclampsia
- offer you screening tests and make sure you understand what's involved before you decide to have any of them
- offer you an [ultrasound scan](#) at 11 to 14 weeks to estimate when your baby is due
- offer you an ultrasound scan at 18 to 21 weeks to check the physical development of your baby and look for 11 rare conditions
- ask about your mood to assess [your mental health](#)
- ask about any past or present severe mental illness or psychiatric treatment

This appointment is an opportunity to tell your midwife or doctor if you're in a vulnerable situation or if you need extra support.

This could be because of domestic abuse or violence, sexual abuse or [female genital mutilation \(FGM\)](#).

FGM can cause problems during labour and childbirth, which can be life threatening for you and your baby.

It's important you tell your midwife or doctor if this has happened to you.

11 to 14 weeks: dating scan

This is the ultrasound scan to estimate when your baby is due, check the physical development of your baby, and screen for possible conditions, including Down's syndrome.

16 weeks pregnant

Your midwife or doctor will give you information about the ultrasound scan you'll be offered at 18 to 21 weeks.

They'll also help with any concerns or questions you have.

Your midwife or doctor should:

- review, discuss and record the results of any screening tests
- measure your blood pressure and test your urine for protein
- consider an iron supplement if you're anaemic

18 to 21 weeks

You'll be offered an ultrasound scan to check the physical development of your baby. This is also known as the [20-week scan](#).

[Screening for HIV, syphilis and hepatitis B](#) will be offered again by a specialist midwife if you opted not to have it earlier in pregnancy.

These tests are recommended as they greatly reduce the risk of passing infection from you to your baby.

At around 20 weeks, you'll be offered the [whooping cough vaccine](#).

25 weeks pregnant

You'll have an appointment at 25 weeks if this is your first baby.

Your midwife or doctor should:

- use a tape measure to measure the size of your uterus
- measure your blood pressure and test your urine for protein
- talk about your baby's movements. If you have any concerns or your baby is moving less than usual, you'll be advised to contact maternity services straight away.

28 weeks

Your midwife or doctor should:

- use a tape measure to measure the size of your uterus
- measure your blood pressure and test your urine for protein
- offer more screening tests
- offer your first anti-D treatment if you're rhesus negative
- discuss how to prepare for your labour and birth
- talk to you about active labour
- discuss what happens after the birth, including how to care for your new baby and feed them
- tell you about the vitamin K injection your baby is recommended to have
- ask about your baby's movements

From 28 weeks, you'll be offered the [RSV vaccine](#). This will help protect your baby from [respiratory syncytial virus \(RSV\)](#) for the first few months after they're born.

It's best to have this as soon as possible from 28 weeks, but it can be given later if needed, including up until you go into labour.

31 weeks

You'll have an appointment at 31 weeks if this is your first baby.

Your midwife or doctor should:

- review, discuss and record the results of any screening tests from the last appointment
- use a tape measure to measure the size of your uterus
- measure your blood pressure and test your urine for protein
- ask about your baby's movements

34 weeks

Your midwife or doctor should give you information about preparing for labour and birth, including how to recognize active labour, ways of coping with pain in labour, and your birth plan.

Your midwife or doctor should:

- review, discuss and record the results of any screening tests from the last appointment
- use a tape measure to measure the size of your uterus
- measure your blood pressure and test your urine for protein
- offer your second anti-D treatment if you're rhesus negative
- ask about your baby's movements

Your midwife or doctor should give you information about caesarean section. This discussion may take place at the 34-week appointment, or at another time during your pregnancy.

They'll discuss with you the reasons why a caesarean might be offered, what the procedure involves, the risks and benefits, and the implications for future pregnancies and births.

36 weeks

Your midwife or doctor should give you information about:

- breastfeeding
- caring for your new-born baby
- vitamin K and screening tests for your new-born baby
- your own health after your baby is born
- the "baby blues" and [postnatal depression](#)

Your midwife or doctor will also:

- use a tape measure to measure the size of your uterus
- check the position of your baby
- measure your blood pressure and test your urine for protein
- offer external cephalic version (ECV) if your baby is in the [breech position](#)
- ask about your baby's movements

38 weeks

Your midwife or doctor will discuss the options and choices about what happens if your pregnancy lasts longer than 41 weeks.

Your midwife or doctor should:

- use a tape measure to measure the size of your uterus
- measure your blood pressure and test your urine for protein
- continue to discuss your labour and birth options with you
- ask about your baby's movements

40 weeks

You'll have an appointment at 40 weeks if this is your first baby.

Your midwife or doctor should give you more information about what happens if your pregnancy lasts longer than 41 weeks.

Your midwife or doctor should:

- use a tape measure to measure the size of your uterus
- measure your blood pressure and test your urine for protein
- ask about your baby's movements

41 weeks

Your midwife or doctor should:

- use a tape measure to measure the size of your uterus
- measure your blood pressure and test your urine for protein
- offer a membrane sweep
- discuss the options and choices for [induction of labour](#)
- ask about your baby's movements

42 weeks

If you have not had your baby by 42 weeks and have chosen not to have an induction, you should be offered increased monitoring of the baby.