

# Preparing for pregnancy

Most children born in Australia are born healthy. But about 2 to 3 babies in 100 are born with a condition that means they will need medical care. Some of the conditions can be detected early in pregnancy, while others cannot.

If you are thinking about becoming pregnant, you should talk to your doctor about your particular situation. You may have conditions in the family that you would like to talk about, or you may have health problems, dietary preferences or other issues you wish to discuss.

You should also talk to your doctor about:

- Taking enough of a vitamin called folate, or folic acid. Folate is present in green leafy vegetables, but many women find it hard to eat enough folate naturally. So all women should take extra folate for at least one month before becoming pregnant, as well as for the first three months of pregnancy. This will lower the risk of having a baby with a neural tube defect, which is a problem in the development of the spinal cord (spina bifida) and/or brain (anencephaly).
- Your family history (see fact sheet on '*Your family history*').
- Your ancestry. For example, certain genetic disorders of the blood cells, known as haemoglobinopathies (see fact sheet 15 on '*Haemoglobinopathies*'), are relatively common in people with a family background from southern Europe, the Middle East, South-East Asia, Africa, the Indian subcontinent, South America, the Caribbean and the Pacific Islands. There are also a number of disorders that are more common in those with Jewish ancestry. People with one of these family backgrounds could be carriers of an altered gene and may wish to consider genetic testing.
- The increased chance for older women of having a baby with Down syndrome or some other chromosome alteration.
- Whether any prescription or other drugs you take could be harmful to a developing baby.
- The potential effects of alcohol and smoking on a developing baby.
- Making sure you are immune to rubella (German measles).

As a result of these conversations, you may benefit from some genetic testing or genetic counselling. Your GP should be able to arrange that, if required.

## Contacts and further information

- All states and the ACT have familial cancer services. Contact them through your local state or territory health department.
- Pregnancy and alcohol at <http://www.alcoholguidelines.gov.au>
- How diet can prevent birth defects. Available in Arabic, Chinese, Croatian, English, Italian, Khmer/Cambodian, Korean, Portuguese, Russian, Serbian, Spanish, Thai, Turkish and Vietnamese at <http://www.mhcs.health.nsw.gov.au/health-public-affairs/mhcs/publications/3460.html>
- MyDr at <http://www.mydr.com.au>
- The Centre for Genetics Education at <http://www.genetics.edu.au>
- HealthInsite at <http://www.healthinsite.com>
- MedicineNet at <http://www.medicinenet.com>
- For other related fact sheets, you can contact the Gene Technology Information Service on **free call Australia-wide 1800 631 276** or email [gtis-australia@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:gtis-australia@unimelb.edu.au) or visit Biotechnology Australia's website at <http://www.biotechnology.gov.au>