

Maternity

Planning for your next pregnancy and the future

There are no rules about when to start having sex again after you give birth. You should wait until the bleeding has stopped and you feel ready. This gives your body time to heal, and to prevent infection. It may take longer if you had stitches or a caesarean section. You can use a water based lubricant gel like KY Jelly after the birth as your vagina may be drier than usual. It is common experience to have less sexual desire, because of tiredness and adjusting to your new role as a mother. If you have any worries or concerns about this, speak to your midwife, health visitor or GP.

Family Planning

You can get pregnant from 3 weeks after the birth of your baby, even if you are breastfeeding. It's important to use contraception until you are ready to get pregnant again.

There are many types of contraception:

- **Natural family planning** (timing and tracking)
- **Condoms** (for men or women)
- **Pills, implants, and coils** (hormonal options)
- **Operations** like sterilisation for women or vasectomy for men, if they don't want any more children

Your midwife, GP, practice nurse and family planning clinic can give you advice. For more information, please visit www.fpa.org.uk. It is important to remember that most methods of contraception do not protect you from sexually transmitted infections.



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Folic acid

Folic acid (B9) is a vitamin that helps a baby's brain and spinal cord grow properly. When you are trying to get pregnant again, you should take 400 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid each day until the end of the 12th week of pregnancy. If you find out you are pregnant and have not started taking folic acid, start as soon as you have a positive pregnancy test.

If you have: pre-existing diabetes, epilepsy treated with medication, coeliac disease, BMI over 30 or you or your family have a history of spinal defects, you will need a higher dose of 5mg. The 5mgs dose is only available on prescription from your doctor. For more information, please visit www.fpa.org.uk/preparing-pregnancy

Measles, Mumps and Rubella vaccination (MMR)

It's a good idea to check you have had 2 MMR vaccines before getting pregnant again. If you are not sure, ask your GP surgery to check for you. Rubella in pregnancy can lead to serious birth defects and miscarriage. You should avoid getting pregnant for 1 month after an MMR vaccination. If you find out you are pregnant within 1 month of an MMR vaccine, or you suspect you were pregnant when you received the MMR vaccination, please contact your midwife/GP for urgent advice.

Screening

If you did not have screening tests for your haemoglobin (Hb), blood group, antibodies, hepatitis B, syphilis, HIV, sickle cell and thalassaemia during your pregnancy, they can be done after your baby is born. The healthcare team looking after you will discuss this with you.

Healthy eating and drinking

It is important to eat a healthy balanced diet. Good foods include:

- Bread, cereals, potatoes, pasta, rice, fruit and vegetables to give you energy.
- Lean meat, chicken, fish, eggs, and pulses for protein.
- Milk, cheese and yoghurt for calcium and protein.

It is also important that you are a healthy weight for your height before getting pregnant again. If you have concerns about your weight, discuss this with your midwife, GP, practice nurse or health visitor. There may be a

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local weight management group or slimming group in your area. Your healthcare team will be able to give you information about this.

General postnatal exercise

Postnatal exercises are very important but you should wait until you are ready. They include abdominal, leg and breathing exercises as well as relaxation techniques. If you had a birth with no problems, you could start gentle exercise as soon as you feel up to it. It is usually a good idea to wait until after your 6 week postnatal check before you start any high impact exercise like running or aerobics. If you had a caesarean section, your recovery time may take longer. You can discuss this with your midwife, GP, or health visitor.

Domestic abuse

1 in 4 women go through domestic abuse at some point and many cases start or worsen during pregnancy or after the birth.

This can be physical, sexual, mental, or emotional abuse, stalking and harassment, online or digital abuse or financial control. It can take place between couple relationships or between family members. Domestic abuse risks both your health and that of your baby. You can speak privately to your healthcare team, or a support agency like the National Domestic Violence Helpline. The Survivors Handbook provides practical support and information for women experiencing domestic abuse, with guidance on seeking support. For more information visit www.womensaid.org.uk

Prescriptions and NHS dental treatment

These are free for 12 months after you have given birth. Your child will also get free prescriptions until they are 16. To claim, ask your midwife, GP, or health visitor how to get an exemption certificate. If you have private dental care, you will need to discuss this with your dental practice.

Work and benefits

The Money Helper website has tips on:

- budgeting for your new baby
- , benefits
- Maternity leave and returning to work

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You can access information online at www.moneyhelper.org.uk

Your employer should also provide information about your options on returning to work and maternity leave entitlements.

Child benefit is also available for each child from birth until at least age 16 and can be claimed by the mother or the person responsible for the care of the child.

Friends and family test

After your baby is born, you will be asked to give feedback on the care you received. This is called the Friends and family test. Completion is your choice, but feedback will help improve services for everyone. You can ask a member of staff for more information about how this information is used. The survey will be repeated when the community midwifery team discharge you from their care. For more information visit www.england.nhs.uk/fft

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