Prenatal Checkups and Tests

myHealth CONNECTIONS
PROMOTING HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Medical checkups and screening tests help keep you and your baby healthy during pregnancy. Typically, routine checkups occur:

- Once each month for weeks 4-28
- Twice each month for weeks 28-36
- Weekly for weeks 36-delivery

Women with high-risk pregnancies need to see their doctors more frequently.

Become a partner with your doctor to manage your care. Keep all of your appointments: every single one is important! Ask questions and educate yourself about this exciting time. You can find a wealth of information about a healthy pregnancy at womenshealth.gov.

Your doctor may recommend the following tests and procedures:

Test	What it is	How it is done
Amniocentesis	Diagnoses certain birth defects, including Down syndrome, cystic fibrosis and spina bifida. Performed at 14 to 20 weeks. May be suggested for couples at higher risk for genetic disorders. Also provides DNA for paternity testing.	A thin needle is used to draw out a small amount of amniotic fluid and cells from the sac surrounding the fetus. The sample is sent to a lab for testing.
Biophysical profile (BPP)	Used in the third trimester to monitor the overall health of the baby and help decide if the baby should be delivered early.	Involves an ultrasound exam, along with a nonstress test. Looks at the baby's breathing, movement, muscle tone, heart rate and the amount of amniotic fluid.
Chorionic villus	Done at 10 to 13 weeks to diagnose certain birth defects, including: • Chromosomal disorders, including Down syndrome • Genetic disorders such as cystic fibrosis May be suggested for couples at higher risk for genetic disorders. Also provides DNA for paternity testing.	A needle removes a small sample of cells from the placenta to be tested.
First trimester screen	Done at 11 to 14 weeks to detect higher risk of: • Chromosomal disorders, including Down syndrome and trisomy 18 • Other problems such as heart defects Can reveal multiple births. Based on test results, your doctor may suggest other follow-up tests.	Involves both a blood test and an ultrasound exam called nuchal translucency screening. The blood test measures the levels of certain substances in the mother's blood. The ultrasound exam measures the thickness at the back of the baby's neck. This information, combined with the mother's age, helps doctors determine risk to the fetus.
Glucose challenge screening	Done at 26 to 28 weeks to determine the mother's risk of gestational diabetes. Based on test results, your doctor may suggest a glucose tolerance test.	You consume a special sugary drink from your doctor. A blood sample is taken one hour later to look for high blood sugar levels.

Test	What it is	How it is done
Glucose tolerance test	Done at 26 to 28 weeks to diagnose gestational diabetes.	Your doctor will tell you what to eat a few days before the test. Then you cannot eat or drink anything but sips of water for 14 hours before the test. Your blood is drawn to test your "fasting blood glucose level." Then you will consume a sugary drink. Your blood will be tested every hour for three hours to see how well your body processes sugar.
Group B streptococcus infection	Done at 36 to 37 weeks to look for bacteria that can cause pneumonia or serious infection in a newborn.	A swab is used to take cells from your vagina and rectum to be tested.
Maternal serum screen (also called quad screen, triple test, triple screen, multiple marker screen or AFP)	Done at 15 to 20 weeks to detect higher risk of: • Chromosomal disorders, including Down syndrome and trisomy 18 • Neural tube defects such as spina bifida Based on test results, your doctor may suggest other tests to diagnose a disorder.	Blood is drawn to measure the levels of certain substances in the mother's blood.
Nonstress test (NST)	Performed after 28 weeks. It can show signs of fetal distress such as your baby not getting enough oxygen.	A belt is placed around the mother's belly to measure the baby's heart rate in response to its own movements.
Ultrasound exam	Can be performed at any point during the pregnancy. Ultrasound exams are not routine. But it is not uncommon for women to have a standard ultrasound exam between 18 and 20 weeks to look for signs of problems with the baby's organs and body systems, and confirm the age of the fetus and proper growth. It also might be able to tell the sex of your baby. Also used as part of the first trimester screen and BPP. Based on exam results, your doctor may suggest other tests or types of ultrasound to help detect a problem.	Ultrasound uses sound waves to create a "picture" of your baby on a monitor. With a standard ultrasound, a gel is spread on your abdomen. A special tool is moved over your abdomen, which allows your doctor and you to view the baby on a monitor.
Urine test	Can detect signs of health problems such as urinary tract infection, diabetes and preeclampsia. If your doctor suspects a problem, the sample might be sent to a lab for more in-depth testing.	You collect a small sample of clean, midstream urine in a sterile plastic cup. Testing strips that look for certain substances in your urine are dipped in the sample. The sample can also be looked at under a microscope.

Source: U.S. Department of Health & Human Services – Office on Women's Health