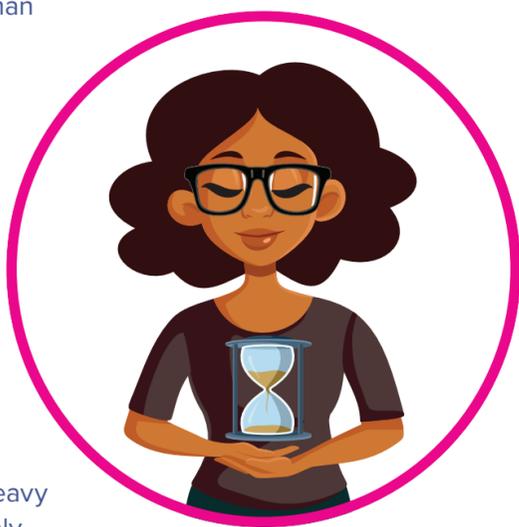


Beyond the Bump: From Preconception to Menopause

Whether you're just entering adulthood, thinking about starting a family or dealing with menopause, it's important that women (and the men in their lives) understand how to navigate through each stage. Each phase of a woman's life calls for targeted care as her body and health needs evolve. A dedicated healthcare professional can help guide you through the care you need — from preconception, pregnancy, childbirth, menopause and beyond.

Preconception Health

The healthcare a woman receives before she becomes pregnant is known as Preconception healthcare. It's never too early for preconception care...pregnancy needn't be the immediate goal. For example, a teenager complaining persistently to her gynecologist about heavy bleeding and extremely painful periods could possibly be diagnosed with endometriosis or fibroids. At the time of the diagnosis, care plans should be created to protect her fertility.



How to Prepare

- Learn your family history as many conditions are hereditary or genetic
- Stop drinking alcohol, smoking and using certain drugs
- Avoid toxic substances and environmental contaminants
- Reach and maintain a healthy weight
- Get Mentally Healthy

PARTNER WITH YOUR HEALTHCARE PROVIDER

See your healthcare provider and schedule the Health Screenings discussed in the last issue of *Wellness Wednesdays* (Cardiovascular, Sexual, Colorectal). These screenings will determine if you have pre-existing conditions that should be addressed before attempting to get pregnant.

Prenatal Health

Prenatal care is medical care you receive during pregnancy. At each prenatal care visit, your healthcare provider checks on you and your growing baby.



How to Prepare

- Schedule your first prenatal care checkup as soon as you think you're pregnant
- Work with your provider to get your essential prenatal tests scheduled, especially screening for sexually transmitted diseases.

Why? Congenital syphilis (a disease that occurs when a mother with syphilis passes the infection on to her baby during pregnancy) has increased by 15 percent since 2019 and **254 percent** since 2016.

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To ensure good health during your pregnancy, attend all prenatal office visits. The health conditions your doctor will be monitoring are:

- High Blood Pressure
- Gestational Diabetes
- Infections

Postpartum Health

Postpartum is the time after delivery when your body slowly returns to its nonpregnant state. In addition to physical changes and medical issues that may arise during this period, healthcare providers should be aware of the mental and psychological needs of the postpartum mother.



How to Prepare

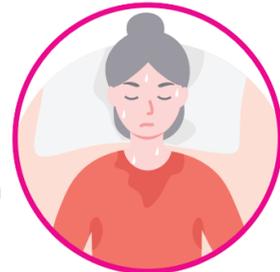
- Listen closely to your body. [Serena Williams](#) demanded a CT scan postpartum which ultimately saved her life. She listened to and understood her body and the symptoms of a blood clot
- Advocate or speak up for yourself. If you're feeling unwell, don't hesitate to be persistent in your communication with your physician and caregivers
- Educate yourself about [Postpartum Complications](#)

PARTNER WITH YOUR HEALTHCARE PROVIDER

- Have contact with your healthcare provider within three weeks of giving birth
- Get ongoing medical care during your postpartum period, as needed
- Have a complete postpartum checkup no later than 12 weeks after giving birth

Menopause Health

Menopause is the time that marks the end of your menstrual cycles. It's diagnosed after you've gone 12 months without a menstrual period. Menopause can happen in your 40s or 50s, but the average age is 51 in the United States.



How to Prepare

Take care of your bones

Bone density begins a steep and rapid decline after menopause because of the loss of bone-protective estrogen. Most recommendations are for a daily vitamin D3 supplement of 1,000 IUs.

Mind your weight

Your metabolism slows as menopause approaches, making weight gain more probable and weight loss more challenging. That's why it's important to maintain a healthy weight (this also helps protect your bones, because cycling between pounds can put added stress on them).

Do your Kegels

Urinary incontinence—the sudden and frequent urge to urinate (along with the occasional leakage of urine)—can become common during perimenopause for some women and can get progressively worse as changes in the vaginal tissue, urethra and pelvic floor occur. Getting into the habit of doing Kegel Exercises now can keep your pelvic floor muscles strong later (the added benefit being this can also benefit your sexual function).

Take care of your heart

Research shows that to ensure a healthy heart after menopause, you must begin controlling whatever risk factors you can before menopause.



Women's and Family Health Pregnancy and Parenting Support

Whether you are pregnant or planning to get pregnant, you should prepare as much as you can. Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Illinois (BCBSIL) has tools to help you. [Well onTarget](#) has self-management programs about pregnancy that you can take online, covering topics such as healthy foods, body changes and labor.

Sources: [womenshealth.gov](#), [kellymoralesobgyn.com](#), [thelancet.com](#), [medicinenet.com](#), [mayoclinic.org](#), [healthywomen.org](#), [menopause.org](#), [heart.org](#)

