

# Patient Handouts on Preconception Health

The following are patient-facing companion handouts that pair with the condition-specific clinical checklists for healthcare providers.

The patient handouts are designed to provide clear, supportive, and easy-to-understand information about how health before pregnancy can affect future outcomes. They explain why preconception health matters, outline practical steps patients can take now, and reinforce that support is available from their healthcare team. Written in plain language and aligned with clinical care, the handouts are intended to empower patients and support shared conversations during and beyond the consultation.

## Each handout is intentionally short (1 page) and focuses on:

- Why this matters before pregnancy
- What patients can do now
- How their healthcare team can help

## How These Handouts Can Be Used

- Given during clinical visits
- Shared via patient portals
- Printed for waiting rooms
- Used in Women's Health Hubs
- Paired with clinician checklists for shared decision-making

**You do not need to be ready for pregnancy to talk about preconception health. These conversations are about giving you information, support, and choices.**

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# Diabetes and Planning a Pregnancy



## Why this matters before pregnancy

Blood sugar levels before pregnancy affect early baby development often before someone knows they are pregnant. High blood sugar around the time of conception increases the risk of pregnancy loss and birth defects.

### What you can do now

- Work with your healthcare team to improve blood sugar control
- Take folic acid as recommended
- Attend eye and kidney checks
- Check your blood pressure
- Use contraception until your diabetes is well controlled, if needed

### About medications

- Some diabetes medications are safer than others in pregnancy
- Do not stop or change medicines on your own
- Insulin is often continued or adjusted

## How we support you

Help plan the safest time for pregnancy

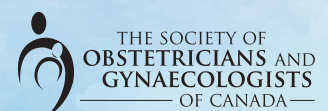
Adjust medications if needed

Coordinate specialist diabetes care

Support contraception until you are ready

***Planning ahead gives you and your baby the best possible start.***

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# High Blood Pressure and Heart Conditions



## Why this matters before pregnancy

Some blood pressure medicines are unsafe in early pregnancy, and high blood pressure and certain health conditions can increase risks for both parent and baby.

### What you can do now

- Have your blood pressure checked regularly
- Talk to your provider before trying for pregnancy
- Take medications as prescribed
- Avoid stopping medications suddenly

### About medications

- Some common blood pressure medicines need to be changed before pregnancy
- Changes are safest when done before pregnancy

## How we support you

Review and adjust medications early

Monitor heart health

Refer to specialists if needed

Plan pregnancy timing together

*Small changes before pregnancy can prevent serious complications.*

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# Epilepsy and Seizure Conditions



## Why this matters before pregnancy

Uncontrolled seizures can be harmful during pregnancy. Planning ahead allows your care team to choose the safest treatment options.

### What you can do now

- Keep taking seizure medication as prescribed
- Tell your provider if you are thinking about pregnancy
- Take folic acid (a higher dose may be needed)
- Keep regular appointments

### About medications

- Some epilepsy medicines have higher risks than others
- Never stop seizure medication suddenly

## How we support you

Work with neurology to stabilise seizures

Adjust medications if needed

Support pregnancy planning safely

Monitor closely during early pregnancy

***Well-controlled seizures are safer than stopping medication.***

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# Asthma and Breathing Conditions



## Why this matters before pregnancy

Poorly controlled asthma can increase pregnancy risks. The good news is that most asthma medicines are considered safe, and well-controlled asthma supports healthy pregnancy outcomes.

### What you can do now

- Use inhalers regularly as prescribed
- Avoid triggers like smoking and vaping
- Get help if symptoms are worsening
- Keep an asthma action plan

### About medications

- Most asthma medications are safer than uncontrolled asthma
- Skipping inhalers can increase risk

## How we support you

Check  
inhaler  
technique

Adjust  
treatment if  
needed

Support  
smoking/vaping  
cessation if  
relevant

Monitor  
symptoms  
closely

***Breathing well before pregnancy supports a healthier pregnancy.***

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# Mental Health and Pregnancy Planning



## Why this matters before pregnancy

Mental health is just as important as physical health. Stopping treatment suddenly can increase the risk of relapse. Being well before pregnancy improves outcomes for both parent and baby.

### What you can do now

- Tell your provider if you're thinking about pregnancy
- Keep taking medications unless advised otherwise
- Ask for help if mood, sleep, anxiety or eating patterns change
- Build support systems around you

### About medications

- Many mental health medicines can be continued in pregnancy
- Decisions are made together, balancing benefits and risks
- Abrupt discontinuation can increase relapse risk

## How we support you

Help you stay well before and after pregnancy

Plan support for pregnancy and postpartum

Coordinate mental health care

Develop a plan if symptoms return

***Staying mentally well helps both parent and baby.***

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# Weight, Nutrition and Metabolic Health



## Why this matters before pregnancy

Nutrition and metabolic health affect fertility, pregnancy outcomes, and long-term child health. Health is not just about weight. Small improvements can reduce risk.

### What you can do now

- Focus on balanced and nourishing foods
- Aim for regular movement you enjoy
- Take folic acid
- Ask for support if food access is difficult
- Set realistic, sustainable goals

### About medications

- Even small changes before pregnancy can improve outcomes.

## How we support you

Provide non-judgmental care

Connect you with nutrition or lifestyle services

Screen for underlying conditions like diabetes if needed

Help set realistic, achievable goals

***Small changes make a real difference.***

**To learn more visit [sogc.org](http://sogc.org)**

# Alcohol, Smoking and Other Substances



## Why this matters before pregnancy

Many pregnancies are recognised after early exposure. No amount of alcohol or smoking/vaping (including other substances) is known to be safe during pregnancy. Reducing or stopping before pregnancy lowers risk.

### What you can do now

- Reduce or stop alcohol, smoking, vaping, or substance use before pregnancy
- Ask for help early -support works best before pregnancy
- Don't stop suddenly without medical advice if dependent
- Consider harm-reduction options if stopping completely feels difficult

## How we support you

Offer non-judgmental support

Provide harm-reduction options, practical strategies and medications if appropriate

Connect you with addiction and mental health services

Support opioid treatment if relevant

***Support before pregnancy protects both you and your baby.***

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# Thyroid Conditions



## Why this matters before pregnancy

Thyroid levels affect fertility and baby brain development. Thyroid hormone needs often increase early in pregnancy.

### What you can do now

- Have thyroid levels checked
- Take thyroid medication regularly
- Tell your provider if pregnancy is planned or possible
- Attend follow-up testing as advised

### About medications

- Doses often need adjustment early in pregnancy
- Planning ahead avoids delays in treatment

## How we support you

Optimise thyroid levels before pregnancy

Plan early monitoring once pregnant

Adjust medication if needed

***Good thyroid control supports healthy development.***

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# Safety, Relationships and Reproductive Control



## Why this matters before pregnancy

Feeling safe and in control of pregnancy decisions is essential for health. Pressure, control, or violence can affect health, fertility, and access to care.

### What you can do now

- Talk to a healthcare provider privately if you feel unsafe
- Know that help is available
- You don't need to make decisions right away
- You have the right to control your reproductive choices

## How we support you

Provide confidential, supportive conversations.

Help you access safety planning and community services

Respect for your choices and safety

*Your safety and choices matter.*

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