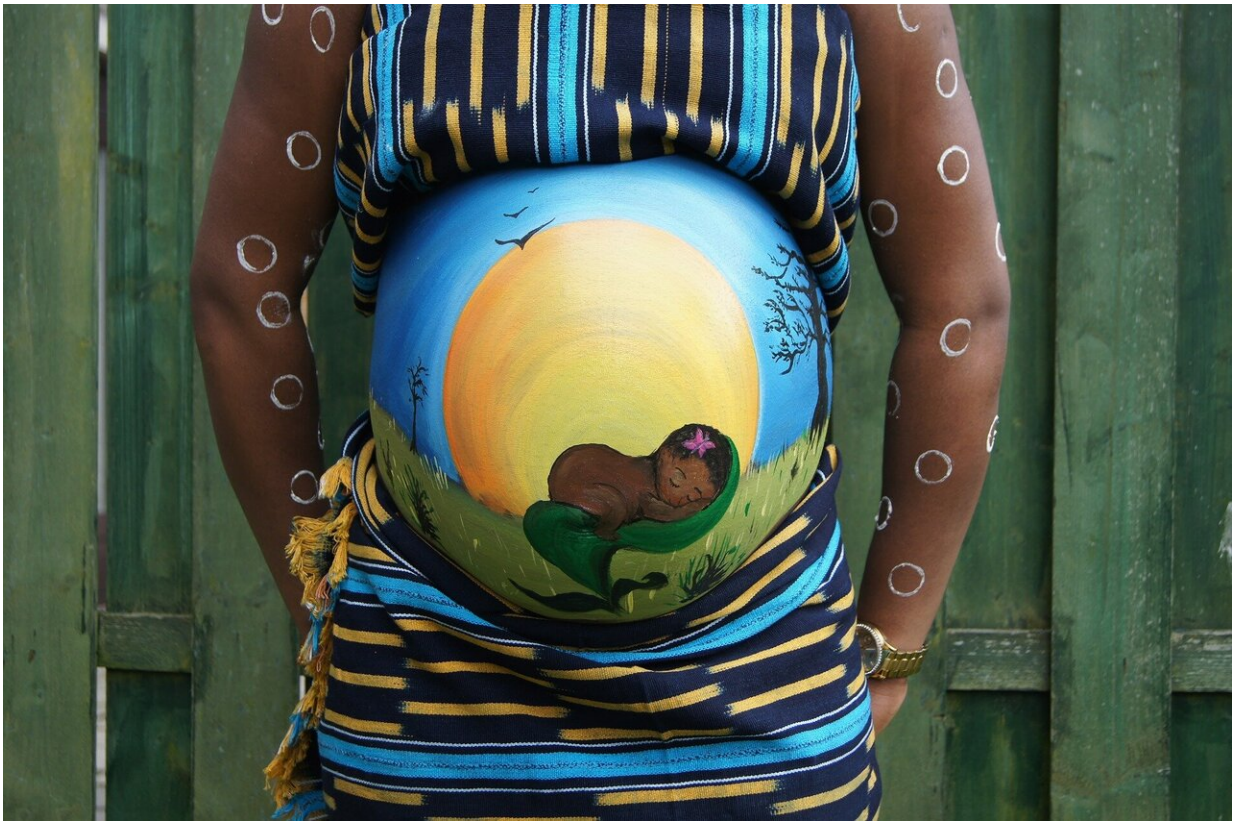


Four ways men and women can improve their health before trying to conceive

January 11 2024, by Merissa Elizabeth Hickman



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

It's well-known how important it is to look after your health during and after pregnancy. But it can also be just as important for both men and women to focus on their health even before they begin trying for a baby.

[Preconception health](#) refers to the lifestyle changes you and your partner can make to create the best possible conditions for [future](#) pregnancies.

Taking care of your health before trying to conceive is crucial for both partners. But even people of reproductive age who may not be thinking of having children anytime soon might still want to [improve their preconception health](#). Doing so sets the stage for a healthier future for all, including any future generations.

So whether or not you consider yourself a future parent, here are a few easy things you can do to improve your preconception health.

1. Focus on your diet

It's well known that a [healthy diet](#) is important for your well-being. It should be no surprise that this is also the case for preconception health.

Managing weight before conception is not only important for a woman's well-being, but it may also reduce the risk of [pregnancy](#) complications. [Studies](#) have shown that a consistently healthy diet, up to three years before pregnancy, is associated with a lower risk of gestational diabetes, [preeclampsia](#) (a condition which causes high blood pressure during and after pregnancy) and pre-term birth.

For men, diet can influence fertility and [how healthy sperm are](#). This is why focusing on eating healthier at least three months before conception is important.

For a healthy diet [it's recommended](#) both men and [women](#):

- consume five portions of fruit and veg daily
- include high-fiber, starchy foods with each meal
- eat plenty of protein

- avoid excess unsaturated oils and spreads
- drink at least [six to eight glasses of water](#) daily.

Women are also advised to take 400mg of folic acid daily, three months before getting pregnant. This decreases the risk of certain congenital defects, such as [spina bifida](#) (a condition where the baby's spinal cord doesn't develop as it should in the womb).

2. Be more active

Regular physical activity is essential when it comes to preconception health.

For women, exercise can help regulate weight and reduce stress. [Both of these factors](#) can also directly influence a woman's ability to conceive and have a healthy pregnancy. [Maintaining a healthy weight](#) also reduces the risk of complications during pregnancy—including gestational diabetes, [high blood pressure](#) and pre-term birth.

For men, exercise not only helps keep weight stable, it can also [improve sperm quality](#). In addition, maintaining a healthy weight may prevent obesity-related issues that affect fertility, such as [hormonal imbalances and decreased sperm quality](#).

During the preconception period, it's [recommended men and women](#) aim to get between 150-300 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity or 75-150 minutes of vigorous activity per week. But any [physical activity](#) is better than none, so find activities you enjoy doing.

[Exercising with your partner](#) is also a good idea. Not only can this boost well-being, it may help you both build healthy lifestyle habits that you continue with into the future.

3. Consider cutting alcohol and nicotine

For couples trying to conceive, avoiding alcohol for [at least six months](#) before conception is advisable. Quitting drinking also offers advantages for soon-to-be parents, including [improved sleep](#), as well as [better energy levels](#) and concentration.

Research shows that when fathers drink during the pregnancy, it increases the chance that their partner [will also drink](#). Considering this influence, aiming for an alcohol-free household before conception may be beneficial in supporting any future pregnancies.

Similarly, nicotine negatively affects fertility, reducing both [sperm quality](#) and [egg quality](#). It can also have serious consequences during pregnancy—including increasing risk of [miscarriage, premature birth and birth defects](#). Even [secondhand smoke poses a risk](#) to pregnancy and fetal complications.

Prioritizing an alcohol-free and smoke-free environment before conceiving sets the stage for a healthier pregnancy and a brighter start for any future children.

4. Prioritize your mental health

Prioritizing your [mental health](#) in the preconception period is essential. It can equip people to handle stress, as well as navigate the emotional ups and downs of any future pregnancies.

Research also shows a positive mental state can [benefit fertility](#) due to improved stress levels.

If you're struggling with your mental health or have been diagnosed with

a mental health condition, you can receive specialized support [in the preconception period](#), so consider speaking with your GP.

Regardless of whether you're trying to have a baby or not, taking care of your health is crucial. Preconception [health](#) includes all people of reproductive age and it lays the groundwork for a healthy future.

Just remember to consult your doctor before making major changes to your lifestyle.

This article is republished from [The Conversation](#) under a Creative Commons license. Read the [original article](#).

Provided by The Conversation

Citation: Four ways men and women can improve their health before trying to conceive (2024, January 11) retrieved 9 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2024-01-ways-men-women-health.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--