

Planning Your Family: Developing a Reproductive Life Plan



What is a reproductive life plan?

A reproductive life plan is a guide for you to follow as you look ahead and plan your family. It is a set of goals you set for yourself about whether or not to have children, when you want to have children, and under what conditions you would like to have children. The plan can be started when you are a teen and can be changed as you grow and get older. You will want to review your reproductive life plan at least once a year to make sure you are on track with your goals as your life may change. Be sure to discuss your reproductive life plan with your health care provider. Your provider can help you develop your plan and meet the goals you set for yourself.

Why is it important to think about having or not having children?

Planning ahead can help you avoid getting pregnant when you don't want to be pregnant and also be in good health if and when you do decide to become pregnant. Many women have at least one pregnancy in their lives, even if it was not planned. In fact, about half of all pregnancies are not planned. Getting pregnant when you did not plan it can be a problem, or it can turn into a happy event. Planning pregnancy leads to healthier pregnancies, healthier mothers, and healthier families.

Although many women want to have a family, not everyone wants to have children. More and more women are childless by choice (also known as childfree). Whether to have children is a personal choice that only you can make. It's okay not to want children! If you never want to get pregnant, it is important to make sure you always use very effective birth control, such as an intrauterine device, the birth control implant, female sterilization (having your tubes tied), or your partner having a vasectomy.

How do I make a reproductive life plan?

The first step is to decide if you want to have children. The next step is to answer questions about your plans for having children. There are 2 sets of questions depending on whether or not you want to have children.

I do want to have children. What questions will help me plan that?

These are important questions to answer if you want to have children:

1. If I am having sex or when I start having sex, do I have a plan in place to prevent pregnancy until I am ready to have a baby? Am I able to speak with someone about birth control options? Who?
2. How many children do I want to have?
3. When would I like to start having children?
4. How old am I now and how old is my partner (if I have one now)?
5. At what age do I want to have my first child?
6. By what age do I want to have my last child?
7. If I want more than one child, how many years apart do I want my children to be?
8. If I want to try to become pregnant soon, do I have any health problems or take any medications that could affect me or my baby?
9. Do I have any history of family illnesses or birth defects that I should discuss with my health care provider before I get pregnant?
10. Is my life stable and supportive of my desire to have children? Do I need to make some changes in my finances, job, relationships, or anything else that would help me be a good parent?
11. If I get pregnant before I am ready, what will I do?

I don't want to have children. What questions will help me plan that?

These are some important questions to answer if you do not want to have children:

1. If I am having sex or when I start having sex, do I have a plan in place to prevent pregnancy? Am I able to speak with someone about birth control options? Who?
2. If I get pregnant, what will I do?

What should I do next?

After considering these important questions, talk about your plans for having or not having children in more depth with your partner, family, and health care provider. A reproductive life plan is important and can help you have a healthy baby and a less stressful pregnancy if you want to have children. It can also help you avoid unintended pregnancy if you do not want to have children.

For More Information**Here are some Web sites to visit if you are considering a pregnancy in the near future:**

March of Dimes: Before Pregnancy

<http://www.marchofdimes.com/pnhec/173.asp>

Mayo Clinic: Is Your Body Ready for Pregnancy?

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/preconception/HQ01251>

US Department of Health and Human Services: Before You Get Pregnant

<http://www.womenshealth.gov/pregnancy/before-you-get-pregnant/preconception-health.cfm>

Here are some Web sites to visit if you want to learn more about your birth control options:

Planned Parenthood: Birth Control

<http://www.plannedparenthood.org/health-topics/birth-control-4211.htm>

Association of Reproductive Health Professionals: Method Match

<http://arhp.org/MethodMatch/>

Here is a Web site to visit to learn about being childless by choice:

The Childfree Life

<http://www.childfreebychoice.com/>

This page may be reproduced for noncommercial use by health care professionals to share with clients. Any other reproduction is subject to the Journal of Midwifery & Women's Health's approval. The information and recommendations appearing on this page are appropriate in most instances, but they are not a substitute for medical diagnosis. For specific information concerning your personal medical condition, the Journal of Midwifery & Women's Health suggests that you consult your health care provider.