

Preconception Health and Health Care

My Reproductive Life Plan

Thinking about your goals for having or not having children and how to achieve those goals is called a *reproductive life plan*. There are many kinds of reproductive life plans. Your plan will depend on your personal goals and dreams.

How to Make a Plan

First, think about your goals for school, for your job or career, and for other important things in your life. Then, think about how having children fits in with those goals.

If you do want to have children one day, think about when and under what conditions you want to become pregnant. This can help ensure that you and your partner are healthy and ready when you choose to have a baby. If you do not want to have children (now or ever), think about how you will prevent pregnancy and what steps you can take to be as healthy as possible.

Try to include as many details as possible in your plan. Some people find it helpful to write their plan down on a piece of paper or in a journal. Be sure to talk with your health care professionals. Doctors and counselors can help you make your plan and achieve your goals.

Questions to Get Started

When making a reproductive life plan, the following questions might be helpful. These are probably not all of the questions that you will want to ask yourself, but they will help you to get started.

If you **DO NOT** want to have children, you might ask yourself:

- How do I plan to prevent pregnancy? Am I sure that I or my partner will be able to use the method chosen without any problems?
- What will I do if I or my partner becomes pregnant by accident?
- What steps can I take to be as healthy as possible?
- What medical conditions (such as diabetes, obesity, and high blood pressure) or other concerns (such as smoking, drinking alcohol, and using drugs) do I need to talk about with my doctor?
- Is it possible I could ever change my mind and want to have children one day?

If you **DO** want to have children one day:

- How old do I want to be when I start and when I stop having children?
- How many children do I want to have?
- How many years do I want between my children?
- What method do I plan to use to prevent pregnancy until I'm ready to have children? Am I sure that I or my partner will be able to use this method without any problems?
- What, if anything, do I want to change about my health, relationships, home, school, work, finances, or other parts of my life to get ready to have children?
- What steps can I take to be as healthy as possible, even if I'm not ready to have children yet?
- What medical conditions (such as diabetes, obesity, and high blood pressure) or other concerns (such as smoking, drinking alcohol, and using drugs) do I need to talk about with my doctor?



Examples of Plans

Following are some examples of reproductive life plans:

- I've decided that I don't want to have any children. I will find a good birth control method. Even though I don't want to have children, I will talk to my doctor about how I can be healthier.
- I'm not ready to have children now because I want to finish school first. I'll make sure I use effective birth control and protect myself from sexually transmitted diseases every time I have sex. Some day, I think I'd like to have two or three children about 2 years apart. Before I get pregnant, I will talk to my doctor about losing weight and eating healthy.
- I want to have children when I've saved some money. My partner has diabetes so, when it's time, I'll encourage her to see her doctor to make sure her body is ready for pregnancy. In the meantime, we're taking really good care of ourselves just for us.
- I might want to have children one day, but I'm not sure right now. For now I'm not going to have sex. Even though I'm not ready to have kids yet, I'm going to talk with my doctor about how I can be as healthy as possible.
- I am in a good relationship and I'm pretty healthy. I want to stop using birth control and try to get pregnant. I'm going to talk to my doctor to find out what I can do to have a healthy pregnancy.
- I've had two kids, and they were only a year apart. Both times, it just happened. I want to have another kid before I turn 36, but I want to wait at least 2 years. I'll talk to my doctor about birth control. This time, I'm going to make sure I get pregnant only when I want to.
- I'm going to let pregnancy just happen whenever it happens. Because I don't know when that will be, I'm making sure that I'm in the best health now, just in case!
- My partner and I are ready to have a child, but we'll need to use a sperm bank or fertility service to get pregnant. I'll make sure I'm in good health and financially stable before we use those services.

Take Action

Once you have a plan, take action. For example, if you've decided to use condoms to prevent pregnancy, be sure to use them every time you have sex. Or, if you've decided to quit smoking, follow through and get help if needed.

Keep in mind that your plan doesn't have to be set in stone. Life is unpredictable! So, make a plan today, give it some thought each year, and expect to make changes along the way.

For more information please visit: www.cdc.gov/preconception

This Reproductive Life Plan was developed in partnership with Merry-K Moos, RN, FNP, MPH, FAAN, Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and is based on her webinar, "Reproductive Life Plans" (February 25, 2010) available at <http://www.beforeandbeyond.org/?page=cme-modules>.



