



12 Ways to Maximize Your Late-in-Life Pregnancy

More and more women are delaying pregnancy until their mid-30s and 40s. But choosing to delay pregnancy involves more than just saying, “Not now.”

If you’re a Mommy-Come-Lately® in-waiting, it’s wise to pursue a healthy lifestyle. The choices you make now will affect your late-in-life pregnancy—for better or worse. An over-35 pregnancy is already a high-risk pregnancy. Conditions such as high blood pressure or diabetes or obesity further complicate your pregnancy.

Here are 12 ways to maximize your late-in-life pregnancy:

1. Maintain a healthy body weight and body mass index (BMI). BMI is the measure of body fat based on height and weight. Being overweight can exacerbate conditions such as high blood pressure and diabetes. You can find a BMI calculator at <http://nhlbisupport.com/bmi/>.
2. Establish regular exercise as part of your lifestyle. This will help you have a better pregnancy, as well as during the physical challenges of labor and delivery.
3. Take folic acid. Any woman of childbearing age should take a multivitamin with 400 milligrams of folic acid to help prevent neural tube defects. The neural tube is the precursor of the baby’s central nervous system, including the brain and the spinal cord. Because the neural tube closes within weeks of conception, a woman should definitely be taking folic acid one month prior to getting pregnant.
4. Don’t smoke. If you already smoke—Stop. Smoking during pregnancy is linked with preterm deliveries, low birth rate, SIDS, and stillbirths. For information and help on how to stop smoking, go to http://www.cancer.org/docroot/PED/ped_10_3.asp?sitearea=PED.
5. Avoid illegal drugs, such as marijuana, cocaine or heroin. Using drugs during the early stages of your pregnancy can cause birth defects and miscarriage. During the last trimester, illegal drug use can stunt your baby’s growth, cause preterm birth or even death.
6. Don’t drink alcohol. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) recommends that women should avoid alcohol entirely while trying to get pregnant or during pregnancy. Physical or mental abnormalities can occur to a baby in the earliest weeks of a pregnancy, even before a woman knows she is pregnant. Alcohol consumption during pregnancy also increases the risk of miscarriage, low birth weight and stillbirth.
7. Check your immunizations prior to conception. Ensure you are immune to rubella and chicken pox (varicella). If not, get immunizations for both rubella and chicken pox three months before getting pregnant.

8. Have your thyroid checked. If you are hypothyroid—when your thyroid is not functioning well—it is usually easily treated with medication. Proper thyroid levels will help prevent maternal and fetal complications during pregnancy.
9. Take care of your emotional health by maintaining relationships that offer encouragement and support. Stay active in things that interest you.
10. Don't ignore your teeth. Once you become pregnant, you may need more frequent dental checkups because hormones can ravage gums and pregnancy gingivitis (inflamed gums due to bacterial plaque building up on teeth) may occur.
11. Control preexisting conditions like high blood pressure, diabetes and/or asthma. Ideally, manage these conditions with medications you can take during your pregnancy. Realize you may need to change your treatment once you become pregnant if your medication poses a risk to your unborn baby.
12. Do Kegel exercises. Such exercises involve repeatedly tightening and releasing the pelvic muscle. Doing so helps maintain the strength and tone of your pelvic floor muscles, which helps during labor and delivery.

Staying healthy isn't about you being in total control of your life. Motherhood will teach you that soon enough! But being as healthy as you can is one of the best gifts you can give yourself and your unborn baby—a strong start for your late-in-life pregnancy.

~Adapted from *Baby Changes Everything: Embracing and Preparing for Motherhood after 35* by Beth K. Vogt

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