

THE PREGNANCY CARE CENTER

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First Trimester Guide

Everything you need to know about your first 12 weeks of pregnancy

What is the first trimester?

The first trimester starts at conception and lasts through week 14. Your body begins adjusting to pregnancy while your baby develops from a single fertilized cell to a fetus with organs and limbs. Regular prenatal care helps monitor this development and address any concerns early.

Prenatal care in the first trimester

Your first prenatal appointment typically occurs around 8–10 weeks. During this visit the provider reviews your medical history, asks about your last menstrual period, any past pregnancies, medications, allergies or family genetic disorders, and performs a physical exam. The exam may include a pelvic exam, Pap test and cultures, and a transvaginal ultrasound to confirm your due date. Blood tests are done to check hemoglobin/hematocrit, blood type and Rh factor, rubella immunity, hepatitis, syphilis and HIV; urine tests screen for sugar and protein【589151041311228†L82-L144】【760898702005119†L321-L335】. You'll discuss diet, exercise, prenatal vitamins and symptoms such as morning sickness or vaginal spotting. Follow-up visits are usually monthly during the first trimester; at each visit your weight, blood pressure and urine are checked, and the provider listens for fetal heart sounds【589151041311228†L124-L144】.

Early pregnancy symptoms

Many people experience implantation spotting, which is light bleeding when the fertilized embryo attaches to the uterine lining【280247711097256†L921-L935】. Hormonal changes can cause tender breasts within the first two weeks and fatigue due to rising progesterone【280247711097256†L927-L934】. Headaches, nausea or "morning sickness," food cravings or aversions, mood swings and frequent urination are also common【280247711097256†L936-L949】. Although these symptoms are normal, contact your provider if you have heavy bleeding, severe pain or any concerns.

Fetal development milestones

During the first few weeks the embryo implants in the uterus and begins forming major organs and structures. By week 12 the fetus measures about 3 inches and the placenta and amniotic fluid are functioning【909023045608732†L65-L80】. All major organs, limbs and facial features have formed and the heartbeat (110-160 beats per minute) can often be heard【909023045608732†L65-L80】. Because these early weeks are critical to development, avoid alcohol, smoking and harmful medications and take a prenatal vitamin with folic acid.

Tips for a healthy first trimester

- **Schedule regular visits.** Early prenatal care allows your provider to monitor your health and your baby's development.
- **Manage symptoms.** Eat small, frequent meals to ease nausea, stay hydrated and rest when you're tired.
- **Eat a balanced diet.** Include fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins and dairy. Avoid raw meats, unpasteurized dairy and high-mercury fish.
- **Stay active.** Walking and low-impact exercise can improve energy and mood; discuss safe activities with your provider.
- **Avoid harmful substances.** Stop smoking and avoid alcohol, drugs and exposure to toxic chemicals.

Sources

1. MedlinePlus: "Prenatal care – when to start and what to expect"【589151041311228†L82-L144】.
2. NICHD: "What are common signs of pregnancy?"【280247711097256†L921-L949】.
3. UnityPoint Health: "First trimester milestones"【909023045608732†L65-L80】.
4. American Pregnancy Association: "What to expect at your first prenatal visit"【760898702005119†L321-L335】.