



LIFE'S ESSENTIAL 8™ for Pregnancy

The road to lifelong cardiovascular health starts early – before birth. Studies show that a mother's cardiovascular health influences her baby's cardiovascular health years into that baby's life. Poor cardiovascular health in a child's early life can cause problems later, too.

Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of maternal death in the U.S. Women's heart health during pregnancy is foresight of future cardiovascular risk later in life, making it important that women understand how to care for themselves and their baby.

The American Heart Association's **Life's Essential 8™** for Pregnancy are the key measures for improving and maintaining cardiovascular health. The eight elements are divided into two areas – health behaviors and health factors. Health behaviors include diet, physical activity, quitting nicotine and sleep. Health factors are body mass index, cholesterol levels, blood sugar and blood pressure.

During pregnancy moving more, eating healthy, sleeping well, knowing your numbers and prenatal care can help reduce complications such as preeclampsia (seriously high blood pressure during pregnancy) and gestational diabetes.

Life's Essential 8 for Pregnancy

- Nurture with Nutrition
- Moms were made to Move
- Stay away from Tobacco
- Sleep Soundly (when you can)
- Be Wise About Weight
- Caring for your Cholesterol
- Blood Sugar and Pregnancy
- Blood Pressure and Pregnancy



The Office of the California Surgeon General's work with Life's Essential 8 for Pregnancy is supported by the American Heart Association.



Nurture with Good Nutrition

Maintaining a healthy eating pattern that supports the growth and development of your baby. Good nutrition before, during and after pregnancy can decrease the risk of gestational diabetes, high blood pressure and other illnesses.



Enjoy

Vegetables, fruits, whole grains, beans and other legumes, nuts, seafood, low-fat dairy, and lean proteins including skinless poultry.



Limit

Sweetened drinks, foods high in sodium and added sugars, fatty and processed meats, full-fat dairy products, and tropical oils like coconut and palm.



Avoid

Trans-fat by reading food labels and minimizing or avoiding fatty meats.

What's Good For Mom Is Good For Baby

Use these tips to help you stay on track with your healthy eating goals.

Focus on Portions and Balance

To support healthy weight gain during pregnancy, listen to your body's hunger cues and eat mindfully. Take your time so you can recognize when you're satisfied and avoid overeating. Aim to choose healthy options with whole grains, vegetables, fruits, legumes, nuts, seafood and low fat dairy.

Cook Consciously

Take control over the nutritional content of your food by learning healthy preparation methods and cooking more at home.

Look For the Heart-Check Mark

When you see it, you can be confident that a product aligns with the American Heart Association's recommendations for an overall healthy eating pattern.

Get Inspired The American Heart Association has hundreds of heart-healthy recipes to choose from at [recipes.heart.org](https://www.heart.org/recipes).

Talk To Your Healthcare Provider

Ask your healthcare provider about what to eat and drink while pregnant, any prenatal vitamins you should take, and the number of calories you need to keep you and your baby healthy. This often depends on your weight, height activity level and can change throughout your pregnancy.

Learn more at
[goredforwomen.org/
lifes8pregnancy](https://www.goredforwomen.org/lifes8pregnancy)



LIFE'S ESSENTIAL 8™ FOR PREGNANCY

Moms Were Made to Move

Staying physically active while pregnant is encouraged but you may need to make some modifications or want to try new ways to move like prenatal yoga, walking, or gardening. **Women should get a weekly total of at least 150 minutes of moderate aerobic activity spread throughout the week.** Including some muscle-strengthening activity (like resistance or weight training) can help reduce the of risk gestational diabetes and associated complications.

What's Good For Mom Is Good For Baby

Remember these tips to help you stay on track with your activity goals.

Set Goals - Set realistic goals and make small, lasting changes to set yourself up for success.

Pace Yourself And Set Goals - Once you reach these goals, keep going. Talk to your healthcare provider about safe ways to gradually increase your activity and intensity as appropriate.

Walk It Off - There are many ways to get active. It's important to find one you enjoy. You may find walking the easiest way to start.

Make Ways To Move More - Find ways to move more throughout your daily routine, whether it's at work, on your commute or at home.

Habits Help Improve Health - Do something active every day at about the same time so it becomes a regular habit. Set a reminder or add it to your schedule so you're less likely to miss a day.

Talk To Your Healthcare Provider

Ask your healthcare provider about the appropriate amount of activity your body can handle at the different stages of pregnancy. Being active isn't about being the strongest or the fastest. It's about finding joy in movement.

Learn more at
goredforwomen.org/lifes8pregnancy



LIFE'S ESSENTIAL 8™ FOR PREGNANCY

Sleep Soundly (When You Can)

Getting a good night's sleep every night is vital to good health and well-being during pregnancy. Most women need 7 to 9 hours of sleep each night, but when you are pregnant you may need more. Too little or too much sleep has been linked to a higher risk of heart disease and other cardiovascular problems.

Good Sleep is a Gift

The benefits of good sleep include:

- Healing and repair of cells, tissues and blood vessels
- Stronger immune system, improved mood and energy
- Better brain function including alertness, decision making, focus, learning, memory, reasoning and problem-solving
- Less risk of chronic disease

Poor sleep may put you at higher risk for:

- Cardiovascular disease
- Cognitive decline and dementia
- Depression, high blood pressure, blood sugar and cholesterol
- Unhealthy weight

What's Good For Mom Is Good For Baby

Remember these tips to help you stay on track with your healthy sleep goals.

Change Where You Charge - Charge your device as far away from your bed as possible. The distance may help you feel less overwhelmed in general.

Don't Bring Stress To Bed - Make to-do lists for the next day before bedtime to help settle your thoughts before you sleep.

Sleep When You Can - Sleepless nights are common while pregnant so sleep when you can. If you still can't get quality sleep talk to your healthcare provider about sleep aides that are safe while pregnant.

Stop The Screens - Shut off the TV and other electronics before bed. The bright blue light from devices can mess with your circadian rhythm and melatonin production.

Embrace The "No" In Notifications - Put your phone on "do not disturb" mode to block notifications if they are waking you when you're trying to sleep.

Talk To Your Healthcare Provider

Ask your healthcare provider how much sleep you and your baby need while pregnant and discuss any challenges you face to getting regular quality sleep.



Stay Away from Tobacco

Let Motherhood Motivate you to Quit

Smoking and vaping can increase the risk of giving birth prematurely, damage to your baby's heart and lungs, abnormal bleeding during labor and delivery, and other birth defects. Even exposure to secondhand smoke while pregnant can increase a baby's health risks in utero and later in life.

Quit Your Way

If you smoke, create a plan to quit as soon as you learn you're pregnant. If you need help call the National Tobacco Quitline at 1-800-QUIT-NOW. You can speak confidentially with a highly trained quit coach.



What's Good For Mom Is Good For Baby

Tame Your Triggers - Learn what triggers your desire to smoke or vape. Stay away from situations that make you want to use tobacco until you're confident you can handle them.

Manage Cravings Through Movement - Physical activity can help you feel good and manage stress and tobacco cravings.

Shut Down Stress - Stress is a part of life and pregnancy can add to this. Learn healthy ways to manage stress to help with your tobacco cravings.

Get Support - A buddy system or support program can help you with some of the common struggles of quitting.

Make Progress Achievable - Set a quit date, make a plan, and celebrate your wins.

Talk To Your Healthcare Provider

Talk to your healthcare provider if you have a history of tobacco use about how it can affect the health of you and your baby. Your healthcare provider can also help you make a plan to quit and connect you to resources. Find more information at heart.org/tobacco.

Learn more at
goredforwomen.org/lifes8pregnancy



Be Wise About Weight

During pregnancy, focus on eating nutritious foods and staying active to help support appropriate weight gain. Gaining weight is necessary throughout your pregnancy but know this is temporary. However, gaining more weight than your recommended amount can increase your risk of high blood pressure, gestational diabetes, and delivery complications.

BMI and Your Baby

Body Mass Index (BMI) is a numerical value of your weight in relation to your height. It can help you know whether you're at a healthy weight or need to lose weight. For pregnant women carrying one baby the following are BMI ranges are considered underweight, normal or overweight.

Underweight (BMI < 18.5): Gain 28–40 lb (about 13–18 kg)

Normal weight (BMI 18.5–24.9): Gain 25–35 lb (about 11–16 kg)

Overweight (BMI 25.0–29.9): Gain 15–25 lb (about 7–11 kg)

Obese (BMI ≥ 30): Gain 11–20 lb (about 5–9 kg)

What's Good For Mom Is Good For Baby

Remember these tips to help you stay on track with your weight management goals.

- Aim to eat a balanced diet high in vegetables, fruits, whole grains, beans and other legumes, nuts, seafood, low-fat dairy, and lean proteins including skinless poultry.
- Get at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity aerobic activity (such as brisk walking) per week.
- Reduce your stress. It's okay to ask for help and take time for yourself.

Talk To Your Healthcare Provider

It's important to track your weight throughout your pregnancy and discuss this regularly with your healthcare provider. They can provide advice on how much weight to gain and look out for weight related risk factors such as gestational diabetes.



Learn more at
goredforwomen.org/lifes8pregnancy



Know Your Cholesterol

Cholesterol is a waxy substance made by your body and also found in some foods from animal sources. It travels in the body by lipoproteins (LDL and HDL). During pregnancy, cholesterol and triglyceride levels naturally rise as part of normal changes in the body. These changes help support your baby's growth and development. But higher-than-normal levels may increase the risk of pregnancy complications such as preeclampsia, gestational diabetes and preterm birth. These conditions may also increase the risk of heart disease later in life.

- **HDL = GOOD:** High-density lipoprotein is known as "good" cholesterol. It helps keep LDL from sticking to artery walls and reduces plaque buildup.
- **LDL = BAD:** Low-density lipoprotein is known as "bad" cholesterol.
- **Triglycerides:** The most common type of fat in the body.
- **Total Cholesterol:** HDL level + LDL level + 1/5th of triglyceride level = total cholesterol level.



What's Good For Mom Is Good For Baby

Remember these tips to help you stay on track with your cholesterol level goals.

Eat Healthy

Enjoy vegetables, fruits, whole grains, beans, nuts, seeds, unsaturated fats and lean proteins as part of an overall healthy eating pattern. Limit ultraprocessed foods that are high in saturated fats, added sugars and sodium.

Move More

Keep moving. As long as your doctor says its OK, physical activity may help improve cholesterol levels.

Find Your Fats

The fats you eat can affect your cholesterol levels. Replace saturated fats like meats, butter, cream, cheese and some baked and fried foods with unsaturated fats like fish, vegetable oils, nuts and seeds.

Stay Away From Tobacco

Smoking and vaping lowers good HDL cholesterol and raises your risk of heart disease and can increase the risk of complications to your baby.

Manage Medications

Certain cholesterol medications are not safe during pregnancy or while lactating. Planning ahead with your health care team helps protect both your heart health and your baby.

Talk To Your Healthcare Professional

Share your pregnancy and reproductive history with your health care team to help personalize your heart health care.



Blood Pressure and Your Baby

High blood pressure is a leading risk factor for heart disease and stroke and often has no symptoms. Because pregnancy can affect your blood pressure numbers it's important to monitor it during your pregnancy and after delivery.

Blood pressure is typically recorded as two numbers, **systolic** (top number) and **diastolic** (bottom number), written as a ratio like this: **117/76 mm Hg**.



Blood Pressure Categories During Pregnancy

CATEGORY	SYSTOLIC mm Hg (top/upper number)	and/or	DIASTOLIC mm Hg (bottom/lower number)
NON-HYPERTENSIVE	LESS THAN 140	and	LESS THAN 90
HYPERTENSION IN PREGNANCY*	140 OR HIGHER	or	90 OR HIGHER
SEVERE HYPERTENSION* <small>(If you don't have symptoms, call your health care professional immediately)</small>	160 OR HIGHER	or	110 OR HIGHER

* If you have any of these symptoms, call 911: severe headache, change in vision, abdominal pain, chest pain, significant swelling, or shortness of breath.

Talk To Your Healthcare Provider

Talk with your healthcare provider about how to monitor your blood pressure. If you are at high risk for preeclampsia, low dose aspirin 81 mg, may be recommended. **Keep checking your blood pressure after delivery**, hypertension can start or persist postpartum. People with a history of pregnancy-related high blood pressure should have it measured **at least annually**.

What's Good For Mom Is Good For Baby

Remember these tips to help you stay on track with your blood pressure goals.

Eat Healthy

Eat a healthy diet of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, beans, legumes, nuts, plant-based proteins, and lean animal proteins like fish and seafood. Limit sugary foods and drinks, red or processed meats, salty foods, refined carbohydrates and highly processed foods.

Move More

Physical activity helps control blood pressure, weight and stress levels.

Be Wise With Weight

If you're overweight, even a slight weight loss can reduce high blood pressure.

Stay Away From Tobacco

Every time you smoke, vape or use tobacco, the nicotine can cause a temporary increase in blood pressure.

Sleep Like A Star

Short sleep (less than 7 hours a night) and poor-quality sleep are associated with high blood pressure.

Learn more at goredforwomen.org/lifes8pregnancy



Blood Sugar and Your Body

Understanding what affects your blood sugar levels while pregnant is important to reducing the risk of cardiovascular complications like gestational diabetes.

Glucose: When we eat food, our body makes glucose, a type of sugar. It travels in the blood to places in the body where energy is needed. Other parts of the body need insulin to carry glucose into cells to be used as energy.

Insulin: Insulin is a hormone made in the pancreas that helps the body's cells take up glucose from blood and lower blood sugar levels.

Gestational diabetes occurs when glucose builds up in the blood instead of going into cells either because the body **develops insulin resistance** and can't use insulin efficiently or the **pancreas gradually loses its ability to produce insulin**.

Fasting Blood Glucose Level, Diagnosis and What it Means:

- **Lower than 100 mg/dl** – Normal – Healthy range
- **100 to 125 mg/dl** – Prediabetes (Impaired Fasting Glucose) – At increased risk of developing diabetes.
- **126 mg/dl or higher** – Diabetes Mellitus (Type 2 diabetes) – At increased risk of heart disease or stroke.
- **A 1-hour glucose ≥ 140 mg/dL** (after the 50-gram Glucose Challenge Test) is a positive screen for gestational diabetes and should be followed by the 3-hour oral glucose tolerance test for diagnosis.



Learn more at
[goredforwomen.org/
lifes8pregnancy](https://goredforwomen.org/lifes8pregnancy)

What's Good For Mom Is Good For Baby

Remember these tips to help you stay on track with your blood sugar goals.

Eat Healthy

Eat a healthy diet of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, beans and other legumes, nuts, seafood, low-fat dairy and lean proteins including skinless poultry. Limit sweetened drinks, foods high in sodium or added sugars, fatty and processed meats, full-fat dairy products, and tropical oils like coconut and palm.

Move More

Being physically active can lower your risk of developing diabetes and help you manage the disease if you already have it.

Be Wise With Weight

Gradual healthy weight gain during pregnancy can help prevent, delay or manage diabetes.

Stay Away From Tobacco

Using tobacco can increase your risk of heart disease, stroke, many cancers and other chronic diseases. It may also make prediabetes and diabetes harder to manage.

Talk To Your Healthcare Provider

Understand your blood sugar levels before, during and after pregnancy. Talk with your healthcare provider about changes you can make that can reduce your risk of diabetes.