

# Before the Baby Comes

## Union Avenue Pediatrics

**Making Preparations.** Preparing for the new baby is the most exciting time in a new parent's life. It is filled with anticipation, joy and uncertainty. You may have many fears and questions before the birth of your child and it may seem that your whole life is preoccupied by this event. But the nine months of pregnancy will give you ample time to make preparations for the new arrival. Taking good care of yourself is the first order of business. Get plenty of rest, don't smoke, and refrain from any alcohol use (or other chemical substance unless prescribed by your doctor). Take only the vitamins prescribed by your doctor and limit caffeine intake. Avoid unnecessary exposure to infectious disease. German measles (rubella) can cause serious birth defects in the developing embryo. Immunization protects against this disease, however you must not be immunized once you have become pregnant. Chickenpox can be dangerous to the fetus, especially if it is contracted near the time of delivery. For cat owners Toxoplasmosis is a danger. If you have a cat, have someone who is not pregnant change the litter box daily. Feed your cat only commercially prepared cat food. The toxoplasmosis organism cannot infect a human until two days after it has been excreted into the cat feces. The viral illness commonly known as "Fifth's Disease" is potentially harmful to your developing baby. This disease is common in school children who develop a mild illness that has the appearance of bright red cheeks on their face. Your obstetrician will perform a blood test to check for immunity to rubella. He or she may also test for other diseases or conditions that could warrant treatment or special precautions surrounding the time of birth. Some include syphilis, AIDS, Herpes, Group B Strep infection, diabetes, genetic disease, and neural tube defects.

**Choosing your Baby's Doctor.** Fewer decisions are more important than choosing the guardian of your baby's health. Consider the following questions in making your decision. Does your baby's physician have the necessary training to treat illnesses ranging from mildest cold to the recognition and treatment of serious life threatening disease? Does your baby's doctor have partners who are equally qualified to render care when your doctor is not on call or otherwise unavailable? Will your doctor, or his or her partner, be examining your baby within twenty-four hours of birth at the hospital and again in several days in the office? Who will be handling your phone calls during office hours? What is their level of training and supervision? Will the doctor be taking his or her own calls after hours or is an answering service used to screen calls? What hospital or hospitals does your baby's doctor prefer to use? Does your baby's doctor follow current guidelines for well baby visits and immunizations?

**Breast or Bottle Feeding?** The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends breast-feeding as the optimal form of infant nutrition. Breast milk contains antibodies that help your baby fight infection. Breast-fed babies are less likely to suffer from allergy to the cow milk proteins

found in cow's milk based formulas. Nursing also offers a special bonding and closeness that is unique. However, not all mothers are able to or desire to breast-feed. Using a properly prepared infant formula can still provide good nutrition. Gentle rocking, cuddling, stroking and gazing into the baby's eyes during feeding can still foster bonding and closeness and can also allow dad to share in the enjoyment of feeding the baby.

**Choosing the Layette.** A layette is the basic collection of baby clothes and accessories that you will need for your baby's first few weeks. A minimal list includes 3 pajama sets (with feet), 6 T-shirts, 3 newborn sacques (loose fitting dress or gown), 2 sweaters, 1 bunting, 2 bonnets, 4 pairs of socks, 4 receiving blankets, 1 set of baby washcloths and towels, and 3 dozen newborn-size diapers. Be sure to buy a size big enough to last more than a few days. Your baby will quickly grow into clothes even if they may be a bit too large at first. Buy flame-retardant sleepwear and clothing and follow the laundering instructions so the flame-retardant properties will not be ruined. Make sure the crotch opens easily for diaper changes. Avoid clothing that fits tightly around the neck, arms, wrists, legs or ankles. Do not buy shoes at this time. They are not necessary until your baby starts to walk.

**Baby Furniture and Equipment.** A Crib must meet certain safety requirements to be considered appropriate for your newborn. Slats should not be more than 2 3/8 inches apart so the baby's head cannot be trapped between them. There should be no cutouts in the footboard or headboard for the same reason. The crib's corner posts should be removed so that loose clothing cannot catch on them. Avoid older cribs passed down to you that may have harmful lead based paint. Make sure that the mattress fits snugly so as the baby cannot slip in between the mattress and crib. Remove any plastic wrapping material from the mattress. A crib bumper should go around the entire crib and be attached with at least six ties that should be no more than six inches long each. (Remove the crib bumper when the baby can pull to a standing position to keep the bumper from being used as a step for climbing out.) If you choose to use a mobile buy one with bright colors and varied shapes. Look how it will appear from below, as that is how your baby will see it. Hang mobiles securely from the side rails high enough that the baby cannot pull it down. Crib gyms, if used, should be removed as soon as your baby gets up on all fours so the baby will not fall on them and become entangled. Never place a crib next to a window. Many parents prefer a cradle for the first month so the baby can sleep in the parents' room. Be sure the cradle has good support and a wide base so it will not collapse or be easily knocked over. A safe and secure changing table, also not placed against a window, should have shelves to hold diapers and other item necessary for changing the baby. A diaper pail with deodorizer is useful to store soiled diapers. A small washtub for bathing the baby is usually more convenient than bathing the baby in the sink. If the air in your nursery is dry, a cool mist humidifier may be helpful to the newborn. Stuffed animals may look cute, and are a popular gift, but they tend to collect dust and may cause stuffy noses. Keep them away until your baby is older and can play with them. A rocking chair is also a helpful addition to sooth and comfort your baby. A night-light and soft lighting in the nursery will be helpful for checking on you infant at night.

**Preparing Siblings.** Children three years old and under do not understand that they will have to share your attention with the new baby. They are still very self centered and will not want to focus on anything that is not about them. They do not need to know early on about their future competition. You can begin to include them in the planning and preparations for the new baby around the same time you start to make prepare the nursery. Let the little brother or sister help in selecting baby clothes, mobiles and other equipment. Major preschooler tasks such as toilet

training and moving from crib to bed are best left until after the baby arrives. Your child is likely to regress slightly after the baby's birth to gain attention. This is entirely normal and will disappear with time. Make sure you take some special time each day with the preschooler to talk, play games and show interest in what he or she is thinking and feeling. Children who are four years old or older can be told about the baby around the same time you tell other friends and relatives you are expecting. Using age appropriate picture books about "where babies come from" can be very useful in explaining the concept of a "baby in mommy's tummy". Family pictures can help explain to your older child that he or she was once a baby too.

**As Delivery Nears.** In the days leading up to delivery, certain preparations can save much time and energy when and after the new baby comes. Get your envelopes ready for the birth announcements and arrange for some housekeeping help. Make and freeze some extra meals to use later. Prepare a checklist. Include the phone numbers of the hospital and doctor, the route to the hospital and a telephone number for someone to take you to the hospital or an ambulance service if needed. Have your bags packed with necessary toiletries, baby clothes and a receiving blanket. Install your infant seat in the back seat facing to the rear. Most of all take a little time to enjoy the quiet moments surrounding you. These moments are about to change forever.

Contributions from "The American Academy of Pediatrics, Caring for Your Baby and Young Child, Birth to Age 5", Steven P. Shelov, M.D., 1993 edition