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Thinking about a baby?

How pathology tests
can help



Getting ready for pregnancy

It's a good idea to see your doctor who will review your general health and family history, discuss any long-running medical conditions and check your immunity against those infectious diseases known to affect the growing baby.

Some routine blood tests can provide a great deal of information about the status of your health. The way your body works is going to change dramatically during pregnancy, and these tests will give your doctor a baseline level from which to monitor your health over the coming months. This is the time to discuss any concerns.



Preparing for pregnancy

Blood tests

These tests provide an excellent overall picture of your health.

Full blood count (FBC)

An FBC measures the number and size of the many different types of cells in the blood. It can help detect a range of health conditions and infections.

Iron studies and B12

During pregnancy you need more iron. If you've had an iron deficiency or are vegetarian or vegan, this test is something you should consider. Your doctor may also suggest testing for vitamin B12.

Vitamin D

If you have a history of poor sun exposure or have coeliac disease, testing for vitamin D may be advisable.

Fasting electrolytes and liver function tests

Your kidneys and liver play central roles in keeping your body's complex chemistry in balance. During pregnancy the balance will change. These tests will give your doctor a set of baseline results from which to start monitoring.

Fasting glucose

A fasting glucose test screens for high blood glucose. A small percentage of women have gestational diabetes during pregnancy, which can affect the baby. High blood glucose rarely causes symptoms and testing is the only way to detect it. A glucose tolerance test (GTT) measures how your body metabolises glucose; the GTT is used to diagnose gestational diabetes and is routinely carried out during pregnancy.

Fasting lipids – cholesterol and triglycerides

These tests measure the fats in your blood. If results show you have high cholesterol, you may be asked to have a high density lipoprotein (HDL) test. HDL helps prevent blockages by moving cholesterol from cells through the blood and into the liver to be processed. Low density lipoprotein (LDL) carries cholesterol from the blood into cells and can deposit plaque on artery walls.

Thyroid-stimulating hormone (TSH)

Changes to hormone levels during pregnancy affect the size and function of the thyroid gland. Low thyroid levels can affect your baby's development, but pregnancy can mask low levels. It's better to have them checked and treated if necessary before you become pregnant.

Infectious diseases and immunity

Some infectious diseases are known to affect the growing baby and your immunity needs to be tested.

Vaccinations

If you have no or low immunity against measles, mumps, rubella and varicella, your vaccinations should be updated. However, as they are live virus vaccines, it is important to wait for at least one month after vaccination before trying to conceive.

Influenza and adult pertussis vaccinations are recommended during each pregnancy. Influenza vaccination is advisable for all pregnant women (it can be given at any time during the pregnancy), and for women planning pregnancy. Pertussis is recommended as a single dose during the third trimester of each pregnancy to protect the newborn infant.

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and hepatitis B and C
STIs can have serious effects on both you and your developing baby. These tests are not routine so it's important to let your doctor know if you think you could be at risk. The doctor may suggest testing for some of the most common STIs – chlamydia, gonorrhoea, syphilis, HIV, hepatitis B (Hep B) and hepatitis C virus (HCV). (These are required tests in antenatal checks during pregnancy). The doctor may also discuss herpes but not necessarily test for the virus.

Group B *Streptococcus* screening

Although *streptococcus* screening is not usually performed prior to pregnancy, your doctor may suggest screening when you are pregnant. If results are positive, antibiotics will be given to you during labour to reduce the risk of the infection being passed on to your baby.

Pap smear

Your doctor will also suggest having a Pap smear if one is due or if you have not had one in the past 18 months. Pap smears are not normally done during pregnancy.

Other infectious diseases

Toxoplasmosis, cytomegalovirus (CMV) and parvovirus are infections that can pose serious problems for the baby. They are not routinely tested for but, if you think you could be at risk, you should raise your concerns with your doctor.

Genetic screening for inherited disorders

Now is the time to take an interest in your family history. If there is anyone in your family with a disorder that could be inherited, talk to your doctor. Genetic testing is available to assess the risk of passing on many of these conditions. Your doctor may refer you to a geneticist so you can have appropriate tests and counselling.



Get to know your
family tree

Preparing for your tests

Fasting blood tests

Some blood tests are labelled 'fasting'. This is because the food you eat affects the test results. You mustn't eat and can only drink water for at least eight hours before giving the sample. However, going without food for too long can also affect results. Do not fast for more than 16 hours.

It's a good idea to fast overnight and then have the sample taken at one of our collection centres first thing in the morning.

If you have diabetes or are taking medications, you must seek your doctor's advice.

Other tests

Some tests may require a urine sample. You can pick up a container from your doctor or one of our collection centres and drop it off at the collection centre when you are ready. Some urine tests need to be collected midstream but others should be collected 'first catch'. It is important you check with your doctor.

Locate your nearest collection centre

For a full list of collection centres and the opening hours, visit snp.com.au.

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