

# Ten things to do BEFORE you become pregnant

(or, if this is not possible, as soon as you can after you know you are pregnant):

1. Be healthy! This includes:

- good diet and regular exercise
- health weight (aim for BMI 20 – 25)
- stop smoking, drinking alcohol and using (other) recreational drugs
- minimize Caffeine intake (to less than about 1–2 espresso coffees per day).

Seek help from your Doctor if you need assistance with any of these.

2. Commence taking an appropriate Multivitamin every day, such as ELEVIT. It is recommended that a woman takes at least 500 mcg Folate each day for at least three months before and after conception to minimize the risk of some congenital malformations – and also at least 150 mcg Iodine each day.
3. If you are taking medications for a medical condition, such as Hypertension, Blood Clotting Abnormalities or Epilepsy, check these with your Doctor. Some medicines are not safe to use during pregnancy, especially during the first trimester.
4. If you have a significant medical condition, such as Diabetes or Thyroid disease, you should make sure with your Doctor that these conditions are being managed in the best way possible to minimize the risk of them causing problems during your pregnancy.
5. Make sure your Cervical Screening Test (“Pap Smear”) is up to date; if it is not, have this done and have any treatment necessary before you become pregnant.
6. Ask your Doctor to check, by blood tests, your immunity to Rubella and Chicken Pox; if you are not immune, then get immunized and then wait three months to start trying for a pregnancy. Tests for other infections (such as HIV, Hepatitis B & C, CMV, Sexually Transmitted Diseases and so on) can also be done before a pregnancy. Also, learn about CMV (Cytomegalovirus) and how to minimize the risk of this virus causing problems for your pregnancy; there is information about CMV in the “Information” tab on this website.
7. Check the family history of both yourself and your partner. If there is a significant history on either side of babies being born with malformations or of inherited genetic conditions, you should seek advice about this before you become pregnant. Your Doctor should be able to refer you for Genetic Counselling.

Furthermore, whether or not you have a specific family history of such problems, it is now possible to offer couples screening for the risk of having a child with a large variety of inherited abnormalities. These abnormalities can happen “out of the blue”, even if there is no history of that problem in the family. One such method of screening is now offered by SONIC GENETICS Pathology; they offer two options:

### **“SONIC Carrier Screening Panel”**

(CF, SMA and Fragile X):

This screening test costs \$385.00 for each partner, or \$770.00 for both partners.

### **“SONIC Beacon Expanded Carrier Screen”**

(tests for about four hundred genes, including CF, SMA and Fragile X):

This screening test costs \$595.00 for each partner, or \$1,190.00 for both partners.

As noted, these tests are not inexpensive at present and there is NO MEDICARE REBATE for these tests as yet. However, these tests can provide very valuable information to a couple to assist with their pregnancy care. Accordingly, the RANZCOG now makes the following recommendation:

*“Information on carrier screening for (other) genetic conditions should be offered to all women planning a pregnancy or in the first trimester of pregnancy. Options for carrier screening include screening with a panel for a limited selection of the most frequent conditions (eg. Cystic Fibrosis, Spinal Muscular Atrophy and Fragile X Syndrome) or screening with an expanded panel that contains many disorders (up to hundreds)”.*

If you wish to do either of these tests, it is best to do this BEFORE pregnancy, so that any issues uncovered by the results can be discussed in detail in a timely fashion.

Links to SONIC information brochures about these tests are given below.

**If you wish to see Dr Stephen O’Callaghan for private Obstetric care, ask your GP to refer you to him at Darwin Private Hospital for a Pre-Conception Counselling visit.**

8. Ensure you can get help with any issue relating to your social situation or mental health.
9. See your Dentist to make sure you do not have any dental problems. Untreated dental infections and so on can get worse in pregnancy, so it is better to sort this out before pregnancy.
10. **If you wish to have private Obstetric care with Dr Stephen O’Callaghan and to give birth to your baby at Darwin Private Hospital, you need to make sure that you have appropriate Private Health Insurance. The Federal Government has recently made changes to the Health Insurance system; for Obstetric Care you will need to have “Gold” (top) level cover, for at least 12 months – so you need to do this well before you become pregnant.**