

Health b4 pregnancy – what you need to know

A guide to using the preconception health animation

Introduction

This guide has been developed to support practitioners to raise awareness of and inform young people about preconception health.

A short animation – ***Health b4 pregnancy*** – has been developed in partnership with young people to promote the importance of health and wellbeing before any future pregnancy.

This guide aims to support use of the animation across youth settings. The animation is aimed at young people between 16 and 24 years of age.

What is preconception health?

Preconception health is the mental and physical health and wellbeing of men and women during their reproductive years, prior to and between pregnancies. All men and women can benefit from good preconception health, whether or not they plan to have a baby now, or in the future. Preconception health includes health conditions (e.g. diabetes, epilepsy) and risk factors (e.g. smoking, obesity, alcohol consumption) that could affect a woman or her unborn baby if she becomes pregnant. Preconception health also includes the prevention of unplanned pregnancy.

Preconception health is important for men as well as women. Excessive alcohol consumption, smoking and obesity can affect male fertility. Men can protect their own health and the health of their family by stopping smoking and reducing exposure to second hand smoke.

Key messages

- Mental health and wellbeing should be promoted. Making sure you are healthy and happy before pregnancy is best for you and any children you may have. Risk of new, and existing, mental health conditions should be identified and managed before pregnancy.
- Practice safer sex and use contraception to reduce the risk of sexually transmitted infections and prevent pregnancy if you are not ready to become a parent.
- Stop smoking (permanently if you can) as this is harmful to you, your unborn baby and those around you.
- Don't drink any alcohol if you think you may become pregnant as this can affect fertility and cause permanent harm to your unborn baby. No alcohol, no risk.
- No illegal drugs are safe for use in pregnancy or when planning pregnancy.
- Take a daily folic acid supplement (of 400 micrograms) if you think you may become pregnant as this helps your baby develop in the early days when you

may not know you are pregnant and can help prevent neural tube defects such as spina bifida.

- Eat well and be active to help you achieve a healthy body weight (body mass index of 18.5-24.9 kg/m²). Being within a healthy weight range is important for a healthy pregnancy and healthy baby.
- Make sure your vaccinations are up-to-date before pregnancy. Ensure you have received two doses of MMR (mumps, measles and rubella) vaccine.
- Check any medications you are prescribed are suitable to take when pregnant.
- Waiting until you are pregnant to improve your health can be too late, especially if you don't know you are pregnant for the first few weeks. Planning pregnancy is essential to ensure you have time to prepare your body for pregnancy and be as healthy as you can be.

Links to Curriculum for Excellence – fourth level

	Experiences and outcomes
Mental and emotional wellbeing	<i>I understand the importance of mental wellbeing and that this can be fostered and strengthened through personal coping skills and positive relationships. I know that it is not always possible to enjoy good mental health and that if this happens there is support available (HWB 4-06a).</i>
Physical wellbeing	<i>I am developing my understanding of the human body and can use this knowledge to maintain and improve my wellbeing and health (HWB 4-15a).</i> <i>I am learning to assess and manage risk, to protect myself and others, and to reduce the potential risk for harm when possible (HWB 4-16a).</i>
Physical activity and health	<i>I continue to enjoy daily participation in moderate to vigorous physical activity and sport and can demonstrate my understanding that it can:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>contribute to and promote my learning</i> • <i>develop my fitness and physical and mental wellbeing</i> • <i>develop my social skills, positive attitudes and values</i> • <i>make an important contribution to living a healthy lifestyle (HWB 4-25a).</i> <i>I have investigated factors which can influence participation in physical activity and food choices, and the impact of activity on population health in the Scottish and wider contexts. I can use this information to discuss policies and inform my own health choices (HWB 4-28a).</i>
Nutrition	<i>I can apply my knowledge and understanding of nutrition, current healthy eating advice and the needs for different groups in the community when planning, choosing, cooking and evaluating dishes (HWB 4-31a).</i>

	<i>Having assessed how lifestyle or life stages can impact on people's nutritional needs, I can explain how these needs are met (HWB 4-32b).</i>
Substance misuse	<i>I understand the impact that ongoing misuse of substances can have on a person's health, future life choices and options (HWB 4-42a).</i>
Relationships, sexual health and parenthood	<p><i>I am developing skills for making decisions about my relationships and sexual behaviour. I am able to apply these to situations that may be challenging or difficult (HWB 4-46c).</i></p> <p><i>Using what I have learned I am able to make informed decisions and choices that promote and protect my own and others' sexual health and wellbeing (HWB 4-47b).</i></p> <p><i>I can explain the importance and the enduring and complex responsibility of being a parent/carer, and the impact on life choices and options (HWB 4-51a).</i></p>

Suggested learning experiences

- View the animation and in small groups discuss:
 - What are the key messages in the animation?
 - Were you familiar with these messages prior to viewing the animation or is this new information?
 - Did the animation deliver the key messages in a way that was easy to understand?
- Investigate data on pregnancy and birth risk factors and outcomes and identify the most important areas for improving health and wellbeing.
- Develop a poster for men and women of childbearing age to advise them on what to think about when planning a pregnancy.
- Conduct interviews with peers about what they think could be done to help more men and women make informed choices about planning pregnancy.

Further information

NHS Lanarkshire. www.nhslanarkshire.org.uk (search for preconception health)

NHS Inform. Planning your pregnancy. <https://www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/pregnancy-and-baby/getting-pregnant/planning-your-pregnancy>

NHS Health Scotland. Ready Steady Baby! <http://www.readysteadybaby.org.uk/>