Q. My husband and I are planning on trying to start a family within the next six months. I was diagnosed with mild endometriosis in April 2007 and I worry about my ability to become pregnant. Are there things I should avoid? Are there supplements I should take? Is there anything I can do to "ensure" my fertility?

A. Endometriosis is when the lining of the uterus grows in abnormal places, and that can cause infertility in many women. But with proactive treatment, you can increase the chance of pregnancy. The vast majority of women with mild endometriosis can get pregnant without difficulty.

Treating mild endometriosis slightly improves the already good pregnancy rates. So if you have recently been treated for endometriosis, it is best to try to get pregnant sooner rather than later.

If you haven't been treated yet, you should discuss treatment options with your doctor to decide on the best course to take to increase your chances of pregnancy.

This question was submitted by a reader. If you have a health question you'd like answered, e-mail us at healthy@plaind.com.

**Supplements** Other than the prenatal vitamins you are already taking, there are no other supplements known to increase the chances of pregnancy. There is nothing out there that can guarantee that you will conceive, but there are some healthy changes that you can make that will be more conducive to pregnancy.

You should, though, make sure you're getting 0.4 milligrams of folic acid (folate) each day. This B vitamin helps reduce a baby's risk of neural tube birth defects such as spina bifida. Folic acid may be obtained naturally through dark green leafy vegetables (i.e. spinach), citrus fruits, nuts, legumes, whole grains and fortified breads and cereals. These foods can be supplemented with a prenatal vitamin which usually contains 0.8 milligrams of folic acid.

Also, women hoping to get pregnant should get at least 1,000 milligrams of calcium (three 8-ounce glasses of skim milk) a day.

**Cutting out bad, unhealthy habits** According to the American Pregnancy Association, you want to make sure that you cut out any habits that are harmful for your baby and replace them with new, healthy habits.

Smoking, drinking, stress and drug use are obvious things to avoid. But also think about prescription drugs that cause birth defects, so check with your health-care provider about any prescription drugs you are taking.

Caffeine is also a problem. Wean yourself off caffeine (including chocolate),
because research has shown that more than 300 milligrams of caffeine per day may reduce fertility by 27 percent.

Caffeine also impedes the body's ability to absorb iron and calcium. Some studies have shown a link between high levels of caffeine consumption and delayed conception. A few studies have shown that there may be an increase in miscarriages among women who consume more than 300 mg (three 5-ounce cups of coffee) a day.

Also, keep an eye on:

- Hazardous chemicals. Some chemicals can also cause birth defects. For example, most studies point out that the greatest risk of exposure to pesticides is during the first three to eight weeks of the first trimester when the neural tube development is occurring. This is often before a woman knows she is pregnant.

- Herbs. There is little or no research on the effect they have on pregnancy. So discuss any herbs you eat with your health-care provider.

New, healthy habits

Along with nixing bad habits, keep up or add healthy habits. Some good exercise options include walking, swimming, bicycling and aerobics. Yoga is an excellent choice for exercise because it incorporates posture, breathing and concentration, which will be beneficial for you during labor.

Also, read books on pregnancy and child birth, get lots of sleep -- eight hours a night -- and practice relaxation techniques (yoga or listening to soft, relaxing music in a warm bath are good ideas). These latter two ideas will help cut down stress.

It's very important to track your menstrual cycle. Your doctor will ask you about this, so you need to be prepared. Keeping track of your cycle will also help you track your ovulation and increase your chance of pregnancy.

Maintain an ideal weight. Your weight plays a significant role in conception and during pregnancy. When planning to conceive, you want to avoid being overweight or underweight.

Talk to your doctor

It is important that you see your doctor before you become pregnant for a few reasons.

Medical conditions that you may not be aware of can affect your pregnancy. Some of the most common conditions include: diabetes, high blood pressure, anemia, thyroid problems and STDs, which can lead to pelvic inflammatory disease and infertility.

Other testing and screening that is common during a preconception health checkup are: pap smear, breast exam, blood type, immunity to rubella (measles) and immunity to chicken pox. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that a woman wait at least four weeks after receiving the vaccination before trying to conceive.

At your appointment you will also be asked for your medical and family history. Some couples may also need to seek genetic counseling. However, for the majority of couples, genetic counseling is not necessary.

If you don't get pregnant after six months of trying, it might be a good idea to touch base with a gynecologist interested in infertility or a fertility specialist.

Tags: University Hospitals Case Medical Center, William Hurd