Home pregnancy tests, when used properly, will give you an accurate answer 97 percent of the time: a NetWellness column
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A pregnancy test detects the presence of a hormone called human chorionic gonadotropin (hCG) in your blood or in your urine. hCG is produced in the placenta shortly after the embryo attaches to the uterine lining and builds up rapidly in your body in the first few days of pregnancy.

There are two types of pregnancy tests; one uses a urine sample, the other a sample of blood. Both tests detect the presence of a hormone called human chorionic gonadotropin (hCG).

Using a Urine Test

There are different types of urine tests, and these can be performed at home or in a clinic. The first type of test involves collecting your urine in a cup and dipping a stick into the urine, or putting urine into a special container with an eyedropper. A second type of test involves placing a stick into your urine stream and catching your urine in midstream.

• Choosing a test: Home tests are very accurate — around 97 percent — when used correctly. Some kits come with two tests because mistakes do happen. However, some tests are more sensitive (and more expensive) than others and can be taken earlier.

Concentrations of hCG are reported in milliInternational Units (mIU) or amounts equal to 1/1000th of an IU per milliliter. A pregnancy test with a sensitivity of 20 IU/L is more sensitive than one with 50 IU/L.

• Taking the Test: It is recommended that you wait until you have missed a period to take a home test. Your body needs time for the hormone to rise to a high enough level to be detected in a test.

If you cannot wait that long to find out and you know the day you may have conceived, then the earliest you can take a test would be 14 days from possible conception.

Tests vary in how long you have to wait to get a result. You will be looking for a change in color, a line, or a symbol (like a plus or minus sign). A new digital pregnancy test offered by Clearblue Easy makes reading your results simple: the window will either show the words "not pregnant" or "pregnant." You can also find recommended midstream urine tests online.

All tests come with instructions, no matter which brand or type you choose to use. It is important that you follow these instructions to get an accurate reading.

The advantages of urine tests include:

• Highly accurate when done correctly
• Provide privacy, as they can be done at home
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Home pregnancy tests, when used properly, will give you an accurate answer 97 percent of the time. However, if not done correctly or taken too early, the result can be inaccurate. If you get a negative result and still have symptoms of pregnancy such as missed period, nausea, breast tenderness, or fatigue, wait a week and take another test or contact your doctor so you can have a blood test performed.

**Using a Blood Test**

There are two types of blood tests:

- Quantitative blood tests measure the exact amount of hCG in the blood.
- Qualitative hCG blood tests give a simple yes or no answer to whether you are pregnant.

The advantages of blood tests include:

- Detection of a pregnancy earlier than a urine test — at three to 10 days from possible conception. However, if a negative result is received, a test should be repeated if a period is missed.
- Measures the concentration of hCG hormone in your blood, which is useful information for your healthcare provider in tracking certain problems in pregnancy.

The disadvantages of blood tests include:

- More expensive than a urine test, and the price depends on cost of the doctor’s visit and lab fees
- Takes longer to get a result than a urine test
- Must be performed in a doctor’s office

**Positive Results**

A positive pregnancy test is a pretty good indication that you are pregnant.

A positive result from a home pregnancy test shows the presence of the hormone hCG in your system. When an embryo implants in a woman’s uterine lining or anywhere else in the body (i.e. ectopic pregnancy), hCG hormone is produced.

False positives (when the test says you’re pregnant but you’re not) are possible, but rare.

**Negative Results**

A negative result can mean that you are not pregnant, you took the test too early, or you performed the test incorrectly. Pregnancy tests vary in their sensitivity (how soon they can detect the hormone hCG), and you may not have given your body enough time to produce enough hCG hormones that will show up on the test.

This is called a false negative (when the test says you are not pregnant but you are). Also, if you let a test sit for too long (longer than the time indicated by the instructions on the box), the test is invalid.

It is best to follow the instructions and wait until you have missed a period before taking the test.

If the test comes back negative but you still think you could be pregnant, wait a few days and try again or see a healthcare professional.

**Mixed Results**

Most pregnancy tests come with two in a box, and it is a good idea to take both. If you have received different answers on multiple pregnancy tests, it is recommended that you seek care from a healthcare professional. They may choose to repeat the urine pregnancy test or to perform a blood test.

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