

## Managing your epilepsy while pregnant

**Keep taking your seizure medicines if you become pregnant.** If you stop, you can cause more seizures. There is a higher chance of harming your baby from having a seizure than from taking your seizure medicines.

**Keep taking folic acid every day.**

**Tell your epilepsy care team as soon as possible that you are pregnant.** We can help choose the best seizure medicine and dose to keep you and your unborn baby safe. Often, people who take levetiracetam and lamotrigine need higher doses while pregnant. This is because the body clears the medicine faster while pregnant.

**Tell your epilepsy care team if you are very sick to your stomach (nauseated) or throwing up (vomiting),** especially if you cannot keep your medicines down\*. We can help you better manage your nausea.

\* If you see seizure medicine in your vomit, take another dose and let your epilepsy care team know.

**Talk to your epilepsy care team about how often to get a blood test to check your seizure medicine drug levels.** Your pregnancy changes how your body handles the seizure medicines. You might need to have your drug levels checked every month. Checking more often helps us know how well your medicines are working.

Get your drug levels checked as soon as possible in these situations:

- You had a seizure.
- You feel more drowsy or sleepy and have blurred vision, or you notice other signs of having too much medicine.

## Where can I find more information?

Speak with your neurologist.

Ask to speak to your epilepsy care team at the Neurology Clinic, such as the pharmacist or nurse.

Learn more about living with epilepsy before and during pregnancy from these online sites.



BC Epilepsy Society  
[bcepilepsy.com](http://bcepilepsy.com)



Epilepsy Ontario  
[epilepsyontario.org](http://epilepsyontario.org)  
Under *Living with Epilepsy*,  
select *Women and Epilepsy*.



Epilepsy Society  
[epilepsysociety.org.uk](http://epilepsysociety.org.uk)  
Under *Living with Epilepsy*,  
select *Pregnancy*.

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Front cover and birth control icons by [Freepik-Flaticon](https://www.freepik-flaticon.com)

[www.fraserhealth.ca](http://www.fraserhealth.ca)

This information does not replace the advice given to you by your healthcare provider.

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## Living with Epilepsy Before and During Pregnancy



 **fraserhealth**

**I am not planning a pregnancy.**  
**Why think about pregnancy now?**

We know that to half of pregnancies are not planned. We also know that some seizure medicines can harm babies while in the womb.

You can reduce the chances of any harmful effects on a future pregnancy by learning how your medicines can affect a pregnancy and the health of an unborn baby.

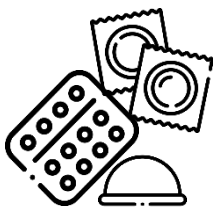


With the right support and planning, you can have a healthy pregnancy and child.

\*A neurologist is a doctor with added training to manage conditions that affect the brain, spinal cord, nerves, and muscles.  
\*A family practitioner refers to your family doctor or nurse practitioner.

**Using birth control**

If you do not want to get pregnant, talk to your neurologist or family practitioner\* about the best birth control option for you.



We recommend that all people with epilepsy who can get pregnant have a birth control plan. Here are reasons why:

- Some seizure medicines can reduce how well birth control pills work.
- Birth control pills can sometimes affect how well seizure medicines work.
- Some seizure medicines can harm unborn babies.

There are lots of birth control types to choose from. Try not to choose birth control pills that have a “pill free period”. This means you stop taking the birth control for 7 days.

A better option is a progesterone only birth control pill or one of the following long term birth control options instead:

- IUD (Intrauterine Device)
- Injected birth control

**Using folic acid**

We recommend that all people with epilepsy who can get pregnant take folic acid, even if they are not trying to get pregnant.



Talk to your epilepsy care team about what is the right amount for you. Every person and situation is different.

Most people need 1.0 mg of folic acid every day. Some people need 4.0 mg for different reasons, such as:

- when taking medicines such as carbamazepine or valproic acid
- when have had a baby with a neural tube defect (a type of birth defect) in the past

Most prenatal vitamins contain folic acid, but not all will have the amount you need. Ask your pharmacist or doctor about what is best for you.

**Did you know?** The Neurodevelopmental Effects of Antiepileptic Drugs study looked at the impact on a child’s IQ\* when mothers started taking folic acid before getting pregnant. Results showed children had higher IQs when their mothers took folic acid before pregnancy than those who started when they became pregnant.

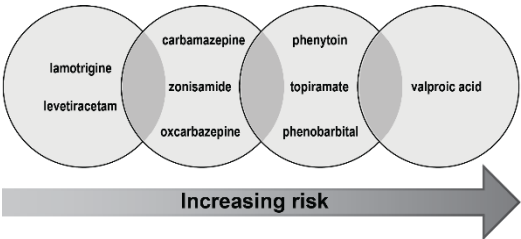
\*IQ, or intelligence quotient, measures how a person thinks and solves problems.

**Planning a pregnancy**



It is normal to have questions about the safety of your seizure medicines in pregnancy. With the right support and planning, you can have a healthy pregnancy. We are here to help.

Some seizure medicines are less likely to cause harm to unborn babies than others. This graph shows the seizure medicines, starting with the ones that have the lowest chance of causing harm:



While a lower dose has less chance of causing harm, taking too little medicine can cause more seizures. More seizures can harm both you and your baby.

It is best to talk to your neurologist 6 to 12 months before you start trying to get pregnant so they can do all of these:

- Make sure you are taking the safest medicine for you and your baby
- Make sure your seizures are stable.
- Do blood tests to check your seizure medicine levels.