



Prenatal Tests and Care

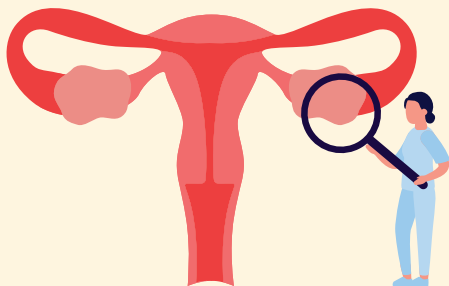


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Currently, advanced technologies have made the journey of pregnancy and motherhood much easier than olden times. Prenatal tests are one such important tool that can be diagnostic or used as screening tests to identify multiple medical conditions. This can help treat or prevent future complications in the mother or the unborn child. Herein, we summarize why prenatal tests should be performed, which ones are recommended and what should be remembered when performing prenatal tests.

Importance of Prenatal tests

Prenatal tests help assess the health of both the mother and the baby. In the mother, these tests can identify her blood group, her risk for diabetes, anemia, and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), and her immunity to certain diseases. In the baby, prenatal tests can identify the risk of genetic problems, birth defects or other conditions. Prenatal tests may be used for screening as they accurately identify medical conditions in the fetus (unborn baby). Most tests are performed via a simple blood sample. Other tests may use urine samples or samples acquired from various other sources such as the mother's cervix, vagina, or rectum.



First Trimester Prenatal Screening Tests

- **Blood tests** - to identify hemoglobin and iron levels, infections and Rhesus (Rh) factor.
- **Weight and Height** - to calculate the mother's Body Mass Index (BMI) as pregnant women with higher than normal weight gain are at a higher risk of medical concerns later in life.
- **Baseline Blood Pressure** - to identify the signs of pregnancy-induced hypertension (PIH).
- **Urine test** - tested for either protein or albumin, indicating PIH or its complications. Checking for infections, and glucose in urine can indicate gestational diabetes.
- **Ultrasound for Fetal Nuchal Translucency** - to examine the posterior part of the fetal neck for enlarged thickening of fluid, which indicates chromosomal abnormalities.
- **Human Chorionic Gonadotropin (hCG)** - Abnormal levels of hCG, produced by the placenta, indicate a higher risk of chromosomal abnormalities.

When performed together, Ultrasound and hCG tests can identify birth defects such as Trisomy 18 and Down's Syndrome (Trisomy 21). In case of abnormal results, additional testing and genetic counselling may be required.

- **Ultrasound** - to identify the due date, detect abnormalities in the fetus, and diagnose a miscarriage. Note that either abdominal or transvaginal ultrasound may be performed.
- **Chorionic Villus Sampling (CVS)** - to check for placental cells and any indication of chromosomal abnormality or genetic disorders in the baby.

Second Trimester Prenatal Screening Tests

The following blood tests are performed for multiple markers that indicate any genetic abnormalities or birth defects in the baby:

- **AFP screening** - abnormal levels of blood AFP can indicate misconstrued due date or twins, and also, chromosomal abnormalities or Neural Tube Defects such as Spina Bifida.
- **Estriol, Inhibin and hCG** - these levels can determine fetal health and well-being.
- **Ultrasound** - to monitor fetal growth, check for the amount of amniotic fluid to identify any fetal abnormalities and measure the cervix's length.
- **Amniocentesis** - to examine the amniotic fluid and to diagnose any congenital disabilities such as Spina Bifida and Down's Syndrome.
- **Glucose tolerance test and Glucose challenge screening** - to identify the risk of gestational diabetes. The blood glucose levels are monitored for an increase in value at different time intervals.



Third Trimester Prenatal Screening Tests

- **Fetal monitoring i.e., Non Stress Test (NST)** - to monitor the baby's heart rate and identify any signs that indicate that the fetus is getting inadequate oxygen (fetal distress).
- **Ultrasound** - to detect the position of the fetus, fetal growth, and amount of amniotic fluid.



Important Advice for Parents-to-be

- Ask questions and clear all your doubts with your ObGyn. Learn about the prenatal tests and their indications - it will help keep your mind at ease!
- Clarify the results with your ObGyn. It's important to remember that screening tests only identify the risk of a certain condition.
- Identify the advantages and limitations of Prenatal Screening tests.
- Know that counselling options are available for any identified chromosomal abnormalities.



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