

# 10 Tips

## for Pregnancy and Family Planning with IgA Nephropathy

*Making sure your health information needs are met*

Many women with IgA Nephropathy worry that it will complicate lifelong dreams of starting a family. It's normal to be concerned about how your condition may impact your pregnancy, your baby and your health.

The good news is that, for many women, it is possible to get pregnant and have a healthy baby, but early planning and close monitoring are a must to keep mom and baby safe and lower the chance of complications. For others, having IgA Nephropathy and reduced kidney function might mean that they need to adjust initial expectations and plans for how they build a family.



Studies show that women with chronic diseases want to know how their condition might impact preconception health, pregnancy and ability to be a parent, as well as how pregnancy might affect their condition. It's not always easy to know where to start or what questions to ask to make decisions about if and when pregnancy makes sense for you. Having access to this information, which is highly individual and should be tailored to your goals and overall health, is an important part of the process and can help allay fears.

### Here are some tips to help:



#### 1. Plan ahead – the earlier, the better.

Share your wishes or plans to have a baby as part of your overall care.

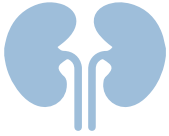
If you are thinking about getting pregnant, make an appointment to talk with your health care team ideally a year or so beforehand. This advanced planning will also give you time to consult a high-risk pregnancy doctor, called a perinatologist or maternal-fetal medicine doctor. Together with your nephrologist and regular OB/GYN, he or she can help you:

- Fully understand what carrying a baby might mean for your health, as well as how pregnancy might affect your kidneys. Although no one can predict the future, you will want to ask how likely it is that you or the baby will have problems and what those issues might be. These early discussions will also give you time to think through whether you are comfortable with the potential challenges and risks or not.
- Map out a plan together so that you feel good about your decision and can head into any pregnancy (if that's the path you choose) in the best health possible. This also includes deciding on the best timing to stop any forms of birth control or certain kidney medicines.

Your thoughts or plans for pregnancy may change over time and that is OK. Just be sure to keep an open dialogue with your health care team.



Remember that the decision to have a baby -- or not -- is yours to make. Because reduced kidney function, high blood pressure and other health issues related to IgA Nephropathy can affect a pregnancy and vice versa, it's important to gather all the information you need to make an informed choice. Talk with your health team, your partner, trusted friends, and other women who've had a similar journey. Always continue to use effective birth control until you make a decision and are ready to be pregnant.



## 2. Be prepared to talk about your kidney function, as well as any other medical conditions you have.

Discuss how these may affect your pregnancy, as well as how to optimally or best manage IgA Nephropathy before conception and over time.



Work together with your health care team to be sure IgA Nephropathy and any other health conditions are as well managed as possible before getting pregnant. Frequent bloodwork will give you and your care team important information. For example, in general, the better the kidney function during the first trimester, the less likely kidney function will decline in later stages. The opposite may be true too.



## 3. Ready your body for pregnancy.

In many ways, pregnancy is a natural stress test for the body, often made more challenging by existing medical conditions. One thing that is in your control is taking steps to help get your body ready for a healthy pregnancy. For example, by:

- Eating a well-balanced, nutritious diet
- Taking a daily prenatal vitamin
- Staying up-to-date with any vaccines you need
- Getting pre-pregnancy bloodwork done so you can review the latest information about your kidney health and other important health measures
- Being physically active



## 4. Avoid tobacco, e-cigarettes and alcohol.

Both can harm the developing baby and your kidneys.



## 5. Know what health issues may arise and what to watch for.

For example, women with IgA Nephropathy are more likely to develop preeclampsia, which causes high blood pressure and protein in the urine. It is usually mild, but it can be severe and is more worrisome in someone whose kidney function is already reduced. You might have headaches, blurred vision or swelling in your hands, feet and face. Preeclampsia can become severe and may cause seizures, stroke, liver damage, or bleeding disorders. It can also affect the baby's growth and health.



#### 6. **Seek a second opinion if needed.**

Whether or not to have a baby is a deeply personal decision and one that is full of hopes and dreams and many emotions. It's important that you feel as though your doctor really listens to and is sensitive to what is most important to you. He or she should also help you understand and sort through all of your options, including when and how to try to get pregnant and the possibility of freezing eggs or embryos.



#### 7. **Find support.**

The decision to start a family is often a difficult one when also managing a chronic condition. And trying to get pregnant isn't always easy either. You may feel nervous about how your health will be affected. And if pregnancy is deemed too risky, the lost dream of carrying a baby and desire to be a parent doesn't go away.

Tune into your thoughts and feelings and don't try to go it alone. Find your village. Join a support group to connect with other women in a similar position or speak to a mental health professional so that you feel supported.



Everyone's IgAN and pregnancy journey is different. Join our online community specifically for women affected by IgAN about all topics related to family planning and pregnancy.



#### 8. **Listen to your body and any gut feelings.**

Pregnancy causes a number of changes in your body. If something doesn't feel right, be sure to talk with your health care team. Doing so may help prevent pregnancy complications before they get more serious.



#### 9. **If you feel that pregnancy is too risky, there are other options for having a family.**

These can include adoption or having a gestational carrier or surrogate (when someone else carries and gives birth to a child for another person/couple). Again, talking with other women who went through similar journeys can be helpful.



#### 10. **Have open conversations with your partner about your feelings about pregnancy or adding a child to the family.** Your partner can also benefit from knowing what to expect before, during, and after the pregnancy or in exploring other options so they can be mentally and emotionally prepared for the journey as well.

**For more information, visit [igan.org](http://igan.org) and join our online support community today.**



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