Good start to life
Be ready to have a healthy baby
The pattern used in this booklet and described below has been developed in consultation with elders and leaders of their respective communities. It is only a symbol of each community and is not a representation of the vast, diverse and rich cultures, languages and values of Maori and Pacific Islander nations.

**COOK ISLANDER**
The circle of fifteen stars, found in the national flag, represent the unity between all fifteen Cook Island nations. These nations are Tongareva, Rakahanga, Manihiki, Pukapuka, Nassau, Suwarrow, Palmerston, Aitutaki, Manuae, Takutea, Aitu, Mitiaro, Mauke, Rarotonga and Mangaia.

**MAORI**
Kowhaiwhai patterning is often used to enhance the original creator's story. Inspired by nature, this patterning may be interpreted to represent growth and new beginnings.

**FIJIAN**
Masi cloths are deeply embedded in Fijian culture. The distinctive floral decorative patterning can help pinpoint exactly where in Fiji the Masi was created. The cloth itself contains the spirit of the land it comes from and the essence of the people who created it.

**FIJIAN INDIAN**
Indian heritage and Island living come together through intricate Henna (Mehandi) patterning. The rounded 'mango' shape (Ambi) represents Indian origins and is known as the national fruit of India. Mangoes represent abundance, as trees become laden when they come to fruit. Embedded within the Ambi is a shell, representing island life.

**PAPUA NEW GUINEAN (PNG)**
The distinctive Bird of Paradise features on the PNG flag, representing the country's independence. In full flight, this beautiful bird suggests freedom.

**SAMOAN**
The Sennit and talking stick bring with them power, wisdom and blessing from all of the high chiefs across Samoa. Only a high chief (Matai) or their appointed orator have the authority to use them when speaking.

**TONGAN**
The Manulua symbol has many permutations across Tonga. All are abstract symbolisations of either two birds in flight or the frangipani flower. Both are potent natural symbols in Tongan culture.
Having a baby is exciting

Mum and Dad-to-be both need to take good care of themselves and what they eat so they can have a healthy baby.

Key tips to remember:

» Talk with your doctor
» Aim for a healthy weight
» Eat good food
» Mum needs extra vitamins and minerals like iron, folate and iodine
» Get your body moving and be active most days of the week
» Take good care of your teeth
» Not drinking any alcohol is the safest option
» It’s best not to smoke or use illegal drugs
» Get emotionally ready
» Dads are very helpful, get involved from the start
Now that you are thinking of having a family, try to find a doctor you are comfortable with and can see regularly.

This will give you and your baby-to-be the best possible care and can make going to appointments easier.

It is a good idea to talk with your doctor about any health problems Mum or Dad may have.

Talk to your parents and grandparents to find out about any health problems that might run in the family.
Sometimes we don’t plan to get pregnant.

Talk with your doctor as soon as you find out. Make sure you let the doctor know about all the medicine and supplements you might be taking. Some medicines are okay to take during pregnancy, but some are not.

If Mum has diabetes, she needs to be extra careful before she falls pregnant. She needs to make sure the sugar in her blood stays at a healthy level.

Have a full check-up with your doctor. They might also want to check if Mum and Dad have health problems that can hurt Baby.
Aim for a healthy weight

Falling pregnant is easier when both Mum and Dad are at a healthy weight.

For Mum, being under or over a healthy weight can:

- Make her monthly period irregular
- Give her problems like high blood pressure and diabetes when she is pregnant

For Dad, being under or over a healthy weight can:

- Lead to poor quality sperm and a lower number of sperm
- Give him problems like high blood pressure and diabetes

A healthy weight is different for everyone so check with your doctor what a healthy weight is for you.
Try and get your weight to a healthy level.

A healthy weight is not always easy to reach. Try making some small changes first, that way it’s easier to keep it off for a long time.

Tips to get to a healthy weight

• Eat whole foods like fruits and lots of veggies
• Cut out the sugary drinks and other junk foods
• Cut down the amount you serve onto your plate
• Get your body moving and be active most days of the week

Don’t overload your plate so much that you can’t see the food at the bottom.
Eat good food

It’s a good idea for both Mum and Dad to start eating good food before falling pregnant. This will help make it easier to keep eating well during pregnancy.
Healthy eating tips

- Eat different types and colours of vegetables and fruits every day
- Choose wholegrain breads, cereals, rice, pasta and noodles
- Choose lean meat if you can or cut off the fatty parts
- Choose reduced fat milk, yoghurts and cheese
- Drink lots of water – tap water is free, safe and readily available
- Cut down on sugary drinks like soft drink, fruit juice, energy drinks, and sports drinks
- Cut down on the starchy veggies like taro, yam, and cassava
- Use less coconut cream
- Avoid alcohol
- Don’t eat junk food like chips, biscuits, coconut buns, fried bread, island donuts and takeaway foods

Everything Mum eats and drinks will affect how baby grows.
Extra vitamins and minerals Mum needs

Iron

Women normally need extra iron because of their monthly periods. When you fall pregnant, Mum needs more iron to help baby grow.

It’s a good idea to start getting Mum’s iron levels to a healthy level before she falls pregnant.

These foods are very high in iron. If you can, choose from this list first.
- Beef, lamb, pork
- Fish (no bones)
- Chicken (no skin)

Other foods which have some iron are:
- Green leafy veggies like taro leaves, pele/aibika, kapi/si/cabbage and watercress
- Baked beans
- Eggs
- Peanut butter

If Mum doesn’t eat much red meat and is feeling tired all the time, go to see the doctor straight away. They might give Mum iron tablets to get you ready for a healthy pregnancy.
Folate

Folate is good to help Mum and Baby to have strong blood. Baby needs folate to help their spinal cord and brain grow well.

Folate is in foods like:

- Green leafy veggies like taro leaves, pele/aibika, kapisi/cabbage and watercress
- Breads and cereals (with folate added)
- Broccoli
- Avocado
- Oranges, paw paw and bananas

It’s best for Mum to start getting extra folate at least one month before falling pregnant.

For more information about folate tablets, ask your doctor.
Iodine

Iodine is good for helping Baby’s brain grow well.

Iodine is in foods like:
- Seafood
- Bread (with added iodine)
- Cheddar cheese
- Eggs

If Mum doesn’t have enough iodine:
- Baby can have problems with learning
- She could have a miscarriage or stillbirth (not born alive)
- Baby might be born too early

For more information about iodine or if Mum-to-be has a thyroid problem, talk to your doctor.
Get your body moving

Getting active before falling pregnant will help Mum through her pregnancy. It helps:

- Mum cope with the changes to her body
- Both Mum and Dad cope with lots of different feelings

Doing some exercise is better than doing none. Start by doing a little bit and gradually get up to the amount the experts say.

Experts say you should do 30 – 60 minutes of exercise on most days of the week.
Don’t sit for long periods of time. Break it up and get your body moving!

Tips for staying active:
• Be active on most days of the week
• Don’t spend lots of time sitting down
• Use the stairs instead of the lift
• Find a buddy to join you and make exercise more fun
• Ask your family, friends or church members about forming an exercise group
• It’s a good idea to join a local fitness group like boot camp or Zumba to help you get more active

Being active helps you feel better and stay at a healthy weight
The island walk isn’t enough to keep you healthy. Walk a bit faster to get you huffing and puffing

How hard should I be exercising?

**Moderate** exercise means you can talk but not sing. Activities like walking quickly, dancing and gardening are good.

**Vigorous** exercise means you are huffing and puffing. Activities like jogging, riding a bike, or sports like netball/rugby are good too.

You should include some strength training activities like push-ups, sit-ups and squats or walking up stairs on most days too.
Take care of your teeth

When Mum falls pregnant, her gums might bleed more often. Take extra care to keep your teeth and gums clean.

If you don’t visit the dentist often, now is a good time. You might need to have tests done, which you can’t do if you are pregnant.

Make sure you clean your teeth and gums two times a day. Use a soft toothbrush and toothpaste that has fluoride.

Drink lots of tap water – it is free, safe and readily available. Tap water has fluoride for strong teeth and it helps wash germs away.
Don’t drink alcohol

Drinking alcohol can make falling pregnant harder.

It’s hard to know exactly when you’ll fall pregnant. NOT drinking alcohol is the safest option when you are planning a pregnancy.

There are people that can help you drink less. Call the Alcohol and Drug Information Service on 1800 177 833.
It’s best if Mum and Dad stop smoking

Smoking can make falling pregnant harder. Stop smoking months before pregnancy.

It’s best for Baby if Mum and Dad stop smoking.

Move away from someone who is smoking. Ask family or friends who are smokers to smoke outside.

There are people that can help you quit. Call the QUITLINE on 13 78 48
Illegal drugs and cultural practices

Using drugs can make it hard to fall pregnant. It can also have lasting effects on children. If you are a drug user, get some help to stop.

There are people that can help you quit using drugs. Call the Alcohol and Drug Information Service on 1800 177 833.

Kava/Yaqona/’Ava/Wati
Drinking too much kava regularly can cause dry, scaly skin and also financial, work, social and family problems. If you drink kava and are planning a pregnancy, it’s best to cut down how much and how often you drink.

Betel Nut
Chewing betel nut causes gum disease and oral cancer. It’s a good idea to stop chewing betel nut if you are planning a pregnancy.
Be emotionally ready

Your mental and emotional health is just as important as getting your body physically ready for pregnancy.

Some Mums and Dads can get depressed before and after Baby is born.

Getting ready for a pregnancy is a BIG thing. It can make you feel excited and scared at the same time.

There are people that can help you get through tough times. Ask your doctor or midwife or call 13 HEALTH.
Some questions couples might have:

• What if we have trouble falling pregnant?
• What kind of parents will we be?
• Is the way our parents or grandparents raised us what we want?
• Will having a baby change ‘us’?
• How will we cope with the costs of having a baby?

What might help:

• Talk to each other about your feelings
• Talk to a midwife about what really happens when you are pregnant
• It’s a good idea to find out what is ‘normal’ for most couples
• Talk to family or friends about what it means to be a Mum or Dad
• Connect with your community or church groups
• Try not to do things that are very stressful like changing jobs, working lots of overtime or moving house
• Talk to each other about how you will buy stuff for Baby on top of everyday costs and money for the family or church
• Exercise and good food will help make you feel better
• See your doctor
Diabetes before pregnancy

If Mum already has diabetes and you are planning a baby, you should talk to your doctor.

It’s important for Mum to have good blood sugar control before you get pregnant so you have a healthy pregnancy.

Mum - talk to your doctor to get the extra care you need.
Acknowledgements

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For further information about the Good Start Program:

📞 (07) 3310 7800
✉️ goodstart@health.qld.gov.au
For more information contact your DOCTOR or:

**CALL 13 HEALTH**
(13 43 25 84)

**ALCOHOL AND DRUG**
Information Service (ADIS)
1800 177 833

These services are confidential with experienced professionals. They can be contacted 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.