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Pregnancy and Pre Conceptual Care in Spina Bifida





Pregnancy and Spina Bifida

Many women with spina bifida are able to become pregnant and have straightforward pregnancies. Before deciding to start a family you may want to know about the risk of your children having spina bifida. As a general average, women or men with spina bifida, and their partners or those who already have a child with spina bifida have a 1 in 25 chance of having a baby with the condition.



How can I reduce this risk?

First of all, we would recommend a referral to a Genetic Counsellor who will discuss you and your partner's family history and answer any concerns and anxieties you may have. You can find more details about this in our information leaflet "Genetic Counselling". Before you try to become pregnant you should consult your GP who should prescribe 5mgs of folic acid daily. If taken 12 weeks before conception and 12 weeks after it is shown to help reduce the risk of the baby having spina bifida. If you are taking any other medication, ask your GP what effect this may have on the absorption of folic acid. It is also important to review any current medications particularly those for bladder management, hypertension and seizures. There are medications considered safer in pregnancy which can be used.



What other checks should I have?

Although the ability to become pregnant is not significantly changed by having spina bifida, the ability to maintain the pregnancy can be affected by where the "lesion" is on your spine and the amount of previous abdominal and pelvic surgery you have had. It is therefore important, that your GP refers you to an Obstetrician for an examination and discussion. You should also ask to see an Urologist to check your kidneys and bladder.

Continued on the next page





What checks during pregnancy will I be offered?

A routine blood test is offered to women between 15 and 20 weeks of pregnancy which detects the levels of Alpha Feto Protein (AFP). A raised level can indicate a number of things, one being a neural tube defect. Where the level is raised a further diagnostic test would then be offered such as a detailed ultrasound scan.



What should I discuss at my first ante natal appointment?

At your first ante-natal appointment with your Midwife you should ensure details of your condition, method of bowel and bladder management, allergies, any mobility and care needs are all recorded on your notes.

If you have hydrocephalus and have a shunt, this should also be noted. This helps avoid the need for repeating your requirements to every health professional you meet during your pregnancy. You should also ask that you and your partner are shown round the maternity ward and labour suite. This will provide the opportunity to discuss any access problems including the availability of a hoist or other transfer equipment. Ask to write a birth plan which can be a general outline of your wishes. You may also wish to discuss the possibility of having an epidural or Caesarian section.



If you have questions or would like further information, please call the **SBH Scotland Helpline** on **03455 211 300** or email **support@sbhscotland.org.uk**
For general enquiries call **03455 211 811** or visit **www.sbhscotland.org.uk**

This fact sheet is for informational purposes only. It is not intended to replace or be relied on as medical or professional advice. Contact us if you require this publication in another format or language.

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