

# Prenatal Screening

## What is prenatal screening?

Prenatal screening looks for signs of certain conditions in a fetus, such as Down syndrome (having extra or abnormal chromosomes which causes problems in brain and body development) or spina bifida (when the bones of the spine don't form properly around part of the spinal cord).

Prenatal screening is done with ultrasounds and blood tests in a pregnant woman in the first and/or second trimesters. It is important to remember that prenatal screening can only tell you the *chance* that your baby will have a condition. In other words, it divides those who *might* have a condition from those who *probably* do not. The results are not a diagnosis – screening tests do *not* tell you for certain if your baby has the condition or not.

## What do the results of a screening test mean?

- A 'negative' screen means that your baby probably does not have one of the conditions that were screened. In this case, more diagnostic testing is not needed.
- A 'positive' screen means that there is a chance (usually a small one) that your baby has one of the conditions screened. In fact, most women who have a positive screen result will not have a child with the condition.

If your screening test is positive, your provider will discuss the benefits and risks of "*diagnostic testing*" with you. Depending on how far along you are in your pregnancy, and the availability of these tests, this will be either chorionic villus sampling (CVS) in the first trimester or amniocentesis in the second trimester. These tests can give you an answer as to whether your baby is affected by one of the conditions.

## How do I decide to have prenatal screening?

To make your decision, you might want to consider the following questions:

- Would you want to know your baby's chances of having a condition like Down syndrome?
- If you had a positive screen result, would you have diagnostic testing done?
- If diagnostic testing showed your baby had a condition like Down syndrome, what would you do? Would you continue the pregnancy? Would this information help you to prepare for the birth of a baby who might need special care?
- How would the screening results affect how you feel during your pregnancy? Would it make you feel anxious or worried?

Remember, it's your choice if you want to have prenatal screening.

## Which prenatal screening tests should I have?

There are different types of prenatal screening tests across Canada. Talk to your pregnancy care provider about which prenatal screening options are available in your area.

## Where can I get more information?

March of Dimes <http://marchofdimes.com>

For Women and their Families (a detailed, 12-page guide to understanding prenatal screening tests). [https://www.mountsinai.on.ca/care/family-medicine-genetics-program/resources/prenatal\\_screening2008.pdf](https://www.mountsinai.on.ca/care/family-medicine-genetics-program/resources/prenatal_screening2008.pdf)

Canadian Down Syndrome Society <http://www.cdss.ca>

## Sources:

1) Prenatal Screening. The Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists <http://sogc.org/publications/prenatal-screening/>

2) For Women and their Families. The Genetics Education Project, Mt Sinai Hospital 2008. [https://www.mountsinai.on.ca/care/family-medicine-genetics-program/resources/prenatal\\_screening2008.pdf](https://www.mountsinai.on.ca/care/family-medicine-genetics-program/resources/prenatal_screening2008.pdf)

