



CUMBERLAND HOUSE

PRIMARY HEALTH CARE CENTRE

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**Epilepsy:
contraception,
conception and
pregnancy counselling**

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Introduction

Most women taking anti-epileptic drugs (AEDs) have epilepsy, although sometimes these drugs are used for other conditions. If you don't have epilepsy, but take AEDs, some of this information may not be relevant to you. Your doctor should be able to help you further.

This fact sheet looks at how women with epilepsy can make sure they are getting the most effective contraception. It also gives information about how they can make their pregnancies as healthy as possible for themselves and their babies.

Contraception

If you have epilepsy or take AEDs, you need to get good advice about your contraception in order to avoid an unplanned pregnancy. For example, natural birth control, such as the rhythm method, is not recommended for women with epilepsy. And AEDs can make some types of contraception not work as well as they should.

For up to date information on epilepsy, AEDs and contraception, contact Epilepsy Action, or visit www.epilepsy.org.uk/contraception

The Family Planning Association may also be able to help you. (Family Planning Association: www.fpa.org.uk; tel. 0845 122 8690).

Pre-conception counselling

If you have epilepsy, pre-conception counselling involves attending an epilepsy or obstetric (relating to childbirth) clinic, where you will have the opportunity to plan properly any future pregnancies. During pre-conception counseling, you will be asked about your epilepsy and you AEDs. They will then discuss with you any changes needed to your AEDs. This is to give you and your baby the best chance of a healthy pregnancy. The clinic will work with you to make any changes before you become pregnant.

Pregnancy

Most women with epilepsy can become pregnant and have healthy pregnancies. However, some women taking AEDs have a slightly higher risk of having a baby with a birth malformation than women who don't take AEDs.

During pregnancy your AEDs need to be closely monitored by your epilepsy specialist. Make a note of any changes to your seizure pattern. If it changes at any time, ask your GP to refer you to your epilepsy specialist for a review of your AEDs.

Folic Acid

During pre-conception counselling, you might be advised to take 5mg of folic acid all of the time, just in case you get pregnant. This is to help reduce the risk of your baby having a malformation such as spina bifida. As it is a much higher dose than for women not taking AEDs, you will need to get a prescription for this dosage from your GP.

Folic acid can affect how well the AEDs phenytoin, Phenobarbital or primidone work. Your doctor will be able to advise you about this.