



## Factsheet:

## Planning a family

Speaking to a medical professional about planning a family is also known as pre-conceptual counselling. It gives you time to improve seizure control and make any changes necessary to your medication before pregnancy and labour. Pre-conceptual counselling is important for any woman but it is particularly important if you have epilepsy.

Some anti-epileptic drugs (AEDs) are not recommended if you are pregnant or breastfeeding. Having seizures during pregnancy can also be a risk to your baby so it is essential to get the balance right.

It is important to remember that most women with epilepsy will have a healthy child. **If you are already pregnant and are worried about your AEDs do not stop taking your medication.** Stopping your medication will make it more likely that you will have a seizure and this can also be a risk for your baby. Contact your GP, consultant, obstetrician or epilepsy specialist nurse and talk to them.

### **Folic Acid**

Folic acid is a vitamin that is very important for the development of a healthy body. It can significantly reduce the risk of neural tube defects (NTDs), such as spina bifida. All women trying to get pregnant are told to take folic acid. Women with epilepsy should take a higher dose (5mg) ideally for at least three months before trying for a baby and during the pregnancy. This dose is only available from your GP or maternity clinic.

### **Genetic Counselling**

Some people will have a history of epilepsy in their family. This is called genetic epilepsy. Current research shows that some types of epilepsy are genetic and others are not. If you are the only person in your family to have epilepsy the chance of your child developing the condition is generally low (around 5%). This will increase if epilepsy already runs in your family or if your partner has epilepsy too. Some hospitals offer genetic counselling where they will study your family medical history and try to work out your risk. You can speak to your doctor about this and ask to be referred.

### **Foetal Anti-Convulsant Syndrome (FACS)**

Some babies can develop Foetal Anti-Convulsant Syndrome (FACS) if they were exposed to certain anti-epileptic drugs (AEDs) while in the womb. FACS can cause physical as well as developmental, behavioural and learning difficulties. Children with FACS can have a mixture of mild to more serious symptoms. Some physical symptoms can be treated.

The risk of your unborn child being affected is small if you only take one drug but becomes higher if you are taking more than one drug or if you are on a high dose of a drug. **If you are worried do not stop taking your medication and get advice.**

We have a factsheet specifically about FACS if you want to learn more about it.

If you are pregnant or planning a pregnancy, contact **your consultant, ESN or GP**. They will be able to give you help and advice.

You can also contact:

- **The UK Epilepsy & Pregnancy Register: 0800 389 1248** where trained staff are available to answer your questions.

**For more help and information**

**Call our helpline 0808 800 2200, text 07786 209 501**

**Or email us at [enquiries@epilepsyscotland.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@epilepsyscotland.org.uk)**