
Unintended Pregnancy Prevention

An unintended pregnancy is a pregnancy that is reported to have been either unwanted (that is, the pregnancy occurred when no children, or no more children, were desired) or mistimed (that is, the pregnancy occurred earlier than desired). Unintended pregnancy is a core concept that is used to better understand the fertility of populations and the unmet need for contraception (birth control) and family planning. Unintended pregnancy mainly results from not using contraception, or inconsistent or incorrect use of effective contraceptive methods.



Unintended pregnancy is associated with an increased risk of problems for the mom and baby. If a pregnancy is not planned before conception, a woman may not be in optimal health for childbearing. For example, women with an unintended pregnancy could delay prenatal care that may affect the health of the baby. Therefore, it is important for all women of reproductive age to adopt healthy behaviors such as—

- Taking folic acid.
- Maintaining a healthy diet and weight.
- Being physically active regularly.
- Quitting tobacco use.
- Abstaining from alcohol and drugs (<http://www.cdc.gov/pwud/>).
- Talking to your health care provider about screening and proper management of chronic diseases.
- Visiting your health care provider at the recommended scheduled time periods (<http://www.cdc.gov/family/checkup/index.htm>) for your age and discuss if or when you are considering becoming pregnant.
- Using effective contraception correctly and consistently if you are sexually active but wish to delay or avoid pregnancy.

In the United States

According to a study published in 2011—

- In 2006, 49% of pregnancies were unintended—a slight increase from 48% in 2001.
- Among women aged 19 years and younger, more than 4 out of 5 pregnancies were unintended.
- The proportion of pregnancies that were unintended was highest among teens younger than age 15 years, at 98%.
- Between 2001 and 2006, the proportion of pregnancies that were unintended—
 - Declined from 89% to 79% among teens aged 15–17 years.
 - Increased from 79% to 83% among women aged 18 and 19 years and from 59% to 64% among women aged 20–24 years.
- Large increases in unintended pregnancy rates were found among women with lower education, low income, and cohabiting women.

Source: Unintended pregnancy in the United States: incidence and disparities, 2006.

(<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3338192/>) *Contraception*. 2011;84(5):478–485.

Recent data from the National Survey of Family Growth show no significant decline in the overall proportion of *unintended births* (live births to women who did not want to get pregnant when they did) between the 1982 and the 2006–2010 surveys. The proportion of births that were unintended did decline during these years among ever-married, non-Hispanic white women. Women more likely to experience unintended births include—

- Unmarried women.
- Black women.
- Women with less education or income.

Source: Intended and unintended births in the United States: 1982–2010. [PDF- 404KB]

(<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nhsr/nhsr055.pdf>) *National Health Statistics Reports*. 2012;55.

The United States has established family planning goals in Healthy People 2020

(<http://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/default.aspx>) aimed at improving pregnancy planning, spacing, and preventing unintended pregnancy. An objective is to increase the proportion of pregnancies that are intended to 56%. Family planning efforts that can help reduce unintended pregnancy include increasing access to contraception, particularly to the more effective and longer acting reversible forms of contraception, and increasing correct and consistent use of contraceptive methods overall among those who are sexually active but wish to delay or avoid pregnancy. Research also has focused on better understanding pregnancy intention and how it is measured. As one study suggests, “A better understanding of the multiple dimensions of unintended pregnancy also may lead to a better understanding of the consequences of these pregnancies.” (The measurement and meaning of unintended pregnancy.

(<http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/journals/3509403.html>) *Perspect Sex Reprod Health*. 2003;35 (2):94–101.)

Related Links

- [Search PubMed for articles on Unintended Pregnancy](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/entrez/query.fcgi?cmd=Search&db=PubMed&term=CDC+unintended+pregnancy)
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