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## Thinking of having a baby?: Epilepsy and Pregnancy

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Clinical Commissioning Group



## EPILEPSY:

### HOW TO OPTIMISE YOUR HEALTH BEFORE PREGNANCY

If you are epileptic, it is important that your epilepsy is well controlled and your medications reviewed before you get pregnant to help to reduce the risks of complications for yourself and your baby. There are certain things that can be done before you become pregnant to help.

The majority of women with epilepsy have healthy babies, but this leaflet is to highlight how we can improve the outcomes for both you and your baby.

#### Here is a brief overview of the risks:

With epilepsy, there is a higher risk of the following during pregnancy:

- Some epilepsy medications are known to cause birth defects such as spina bifida, congenital heart disorders, urinary tract and skeletal abnormalities and cleft palate
- The risk depends on the type, number and dose of the medication
- Lamotrigine and carbamazepine have the least risk
- There may also be a possible impact on the long term brain and nervous system development of babies born to mothers taking a medicine called valproate
- However, your GP can refer you to a preconception clinic to help to optimise your epilepsy care before becoming pregnant.

## Local Voluntary Services

Service	Description	Contact Details
Anna Freud Centre	Collection of services for families. Social Care.	0207 794 2313
Bikur Cholem	Orthodox Jewish MH Support Network/Services	020 8800 7575
Bump Buddies	Shoreditch Trust based support network	<a href="http://www.shoreditchtrust.org.uk/health-and-wellbeing/bump-buddies/">http://www.shoreditchtrust.org.uk/health-and-wellbeing/bump-buddies/</a>
CAMHS	Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services	GP Referral
Children's Centre	Children's day care and activity centres.	<a href="https://www.learningtrust.co.uk/ChildcarePlay/Pages/Children'sCentresandNurses.aspx">https://www.learningtrust.co.uk/ChildcarePlay/Pages/Children'sCentresandNurses.aspx</a>
CMHT Adult Mental Health	Community Mental Health	GP Referral
CYPS	Children and Young People's Service	GP Referral
Derman	Turkish/Kurdish support service	020 7613 5944
Ezer Leylolds	Orthodox Jewish family support group	020 8800 2488
First Steps	CAMHS Service	020 7683 4611
Hackney Wellbeing	Centre for Better Health	020 8985 3570
Mind	Mental Health Charity	020 8985 4239
Netmums	Online Support Network/Services	<a href="https://www.netmums.com/hackney">https://www.netmums.com/hackney</a>
Off Centre	Young People's MH Service Hackney	020 8986 4016
Orbit	Drug and Alcohol Support for Mothers	020 7749 9850

### Support and advice:

However, as has been discussed there are many local voluntary services to contact in order to get help with epilepsy pregnancy queries and support. Please see the Hackney iCARE database for local classes in your area, as well as the organisations in the table overleaf for any further advice.

<https://www.hackneyicare.org.uk/kb5/hackney/asch/home.page>



Alongside this, there is a very informative page on the Epilepsy Action Charity Page Titled: "Planning a baby."

Here is the hyperlink: <https://www.epilepsy.org.uk/info/women/having-baby/planning>

Please ask your GP if you need a physical copy of the leaflet.

### Reducing your risk

The following can help to reduce these risks before becoming pregnant:

- You should take a higher dose of folic acid from your doctor, 5mg, when trying to conceive and up until the end of the first trimester (12 weeks)
- The lowest effective dose of epilepsy medicines should be used as advised by your doctor
- You should see your doctor to review your medications before you become pregnant to minimise exposure to the higher risk medications such as valproate. Never stop your medications without talking to your doctor first. In general, it is more important to keep taking your medications should you become pregnant to reduce the risks of you having seizures as seizures can be more dangerous during pregnancy than the medications themselves.
- Your doctor will also give you advice on prenatal screening, risks of stopping medications suddenly, effects of seizures and medications on your baby and pregnancy, breastfeeding and contraception advice.
- Your doctor will also inform you of safety precautions to take to reduce risks of accidents associated with seizures