



*Birth Spacing: Take the Time to Build a Strong, Healthy Family*

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# Prepare:

*A strong and healthy  
family takes planning*

Family planning means deciding **the number of children you want and when you want to have them.**

Talk to your health care provider to learn how to plan a pregnancy when you and your family are ready to have a baby.

## *How soon is too soon?*

Planning to wait **at least two years** after giving birth before trying to get pregnant again is healthier for mothers and babies.

## *Why wait?*

- Improved health for the mother and baby
- Better nutrition and development of each child
- More time for the family to give special attention to each child

## Wait:

*Spacing pregnancies two years apart is healthy*

A woman who waits until her child is at least two years old before becoming pregnant again makes the healthiest choice for her baby. A mother will have enough time to recover from pregnancy and childbirth and have more time to regain health and energy.

## *Benefits to the new baby:*

- The baby has a better chance of being born on time, and not too early.
- The baby has a better chance of having a healthy weight and being strong at birth. Babies born too early or underweight face a higher risk of disabilities.
- Planning enough time between pregnancies allows the mother to breastfeed for a longer period of time. Breast milk offers unique nutrition to a growing infant.

## *Benefits to older siblings:*

- Parents have more time to prepare foods for the older child.
- Parents have more time to provide the loving attention the older child needs and wants.

Save:

*Kids are expensive*

How much can one little baby cost?

Turns out, a lot.

*Let's run the numbers:*

The U.S. Department of Agriculture calculates estimates of the yearly expenses for children from the day they are born until age 17.

Think about hundreds of dollars for clothes.

Diapers.

Add health care.

Set aside thousands more for child care.

All of this adds up over time.

The estimated total expenses for a child, from birth to age 17, for a two-parent family in Alaska:

***\$239,000\****

\*Estimate calculated for a two-parent household earning a mid-range income in the urban West.



## *It helps to save:*

Jessie is a 25-year-old mother of three children. In about six months, she'll deliver a fourth baby who will be the sibling of Faith, Caleb and Victoria.

Jessie has taken big steps toward becoming self-sufficient. She works full-time as a case worker for families applying for government assistance. She is completing a degree in Rural Human Services through the University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Still, Jessie says she would have made what she calls "smarter" choices if she had a second chance.

"I was 18 when I got pregnant with my first child, and I would have waited a little longer to make my life a little more stable before having a child."

Jessie did not graduate from high school, but earned her GED. She recently bought a home, but wished she could have done that before having children. Jessie has a job that provides for her family, but wishes she would have had one years ago.





# Invest:

## *Meeting goals can strengthen your family*

*Kameron and Monica are getting ready for a big addition. Their second daughter will arrive in just a month.*

*The couple waited until they'd completed a number of goals before they started a family. They got married. Monica built her career as a nurse. Kameron finished his master's degree in business administration. Now he's the executive director of a nonprofit organization.*

*Monica said finishing school and establishing her career were priorities before having a child.*

*"Those were the big things for me," she said.*

*Kameron and Monica also chose to wait until their first daughter, Isabel, was almost 2 years old before trying to get pregnant again. Now the family is ready to welcome another baby.*



# Respect:

## *Talk it out first*

You have the right to choose if and when you have sex, who you have sex with, and if and when to have a baby.

## *You have choices:*

- **Keep the lines of communication open.** Discuss your feelings about sex with your partner and come up with alternatives to sex if you are not comfortable or if you feel unsafe.
- **Make healthy choices.** Choose not to have sex when you are uncomfortable, not ready for sex or under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- **Be safe.** Choose not to have sex if you do not feel safe, or if the sex is unprotected (without a condom or other method of birth control).
- **Learn the risks.** Having unprotected sex can lead to getting sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS. Alaska has the nation's highest rate of chlamydia and second highest rate of gonorrhea. Using condoms correctly and every time you have sex reduces the spread of these STDs, which can cause long-term health problems, including infertility.

# Recover:

*Moms need sleep,  
good nutrition and exercise*

A new mother's body needs to regain strength and energy following the birth of her baby.

## *A healthy postpartum recovery:*

- Getting enough rest is important. If the baby is still waking up at night, try to find time to lie down and rest during the day. If possible, sleep when the baby naps.
- Breastfeeding a baby requires a mother to drink enough fluids and eat a well-balanced diet with enough nutrients to support her and her baby.
- Nutritious meals and regular physical activity can help a mother return to a healthy weight.
- Some mothers develop health problems during the year following the birth of their baby. Postpartum depression can make mothers feel sad, irritable or low on energy. Mothers may have trouble sleeping or eating, or have thoughts of hurting themselves or their baby. These problems are treatable. Contact your health care provider as soon as possible so you can get the help you need to feel better.



## *Worth the wait:*

*Annette and her husband Ryder are both Inupiat and grew up in a northwestern Alaska village. Annette graduated from the University of Alaska Fairbanks, moved to Anchorage and now works to promote improved education in rural Alaska.*

*Ryder is working on his college degree and stays home to care for their baby daughter, Mariska. Annette delivered their baby girl when she was 29, after she and Ryder had been married for four years.*

*“We waited a long time to have a child because there were so many unplanned pregnancies in our village. We saw our own classmates struggle.”*

*Annette and Ryder plan to wait to have another child. She knows that recovering from birth takes time.*

*“Pregnancy and having a child — this is a huge deal,” Annette said. “We need to wait. We need to recover from this and wait.”*



# Plan ahead:

## *Find the right birth control method for you*

Talk to your health care provider about your options. Just over half (55%) of Alaska mothers whose babies were born in 2009 said that a health care worker talked with them about how long to wait before getting pregnant again.

A woman can protect herself from having an unplanned pregnancy by using a method of birth control.

For women who have just given birth, some methods of birth control can be provided before going home from the hospital. Other methods have to wait until the mother has stopped breastfeeding.

Breastfeeding may help prevent a woman from getting pregnant again. However, it is not a reliable form of birth control. Most breastfeeding women will need another form of birth control to prevent pregnancy.

Without birth control, a woman can get pregnant as soon as four to six weeks after giving birth.

To make an informed decision about birth control, read through the methods on the following page and discuss them with your health care provider.

## Effectiveness of birth control methods

Methods	How well the method works to prevent unplanned pregnancy for most people	Number of pregnancies expected per 100 women with typical use of the method
Reversible methods		
Abstinence or not having intercourse	Most effective and <b>protects against STDs</b>	None
Hormonal contraceptive implant hormonal intrauterine contraception (IUD), copper intrauterine contraception (IUD)	Highly effective	Less than one
Hormonal shot, hormonal vaginal ring, hormonal skin patch, hormonal oral pills	Very effective	3-8
Male condom	Effective and <b>protects against STDs</b>	11
Female condom	Effective and <b>protects against STDs</b>	20
Emergency contraception	Effective	When used within 72 hours after sex may reduce risk of unplanned pregnancy by 85%
Diaphragm, sponge, spermicides	Somewhat effective	15-32
Fertility awareness or cycle method, withdrawal	Somewhat effective	12-27
Breastfeeding	Effectiveness varies	Variable
No method	Not effective	85
Permanent methods		
Female sterilization, male sterilization (vasectomy)	Highly effective	Less than one



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