

Nourishing Yourself to Nourish Your Baby

Hopefully you read my article in the last issue of Tummy to Toddler regarding nutrition prior to conception. This gives you a jumpstart on the pregnancy starting with good tissue levels of all the important nutrients.

Pregnancy offers challenges to the mother, and many of them can be addressed by adjusting nutrient intake, lifestyle and exercise. Pregnancy is no time to try losing weight. Optimum weight gain is 25–35 pounds. If the mother is underweight this can go up to 28–40 pounds, and if the mother begins the pregnancy overweight, weight gain can be kept at 15–25 pounds. During the first trimester, plan to gain 2–4 pounds, and during the last six months approximately 1 pound per week. This can be accomplished by eating a diet that is nutrient-dense, with little or no “empty-calorie” foods such as sweets, sodas and alcohol. Emphasize adequate protein (3–4 oz. at least three times per day, with small amounts between meals, such as nuts and seeds or cheese). Include wild, cold-water fish at least twice a week from unpolluted waters, and limit tuna to one serving per **month** due to mercury contamination. Include as many different colors of fruits and vegetables every day, aiming for 7 servings of vegetables and 2–3 per day of fruit. Dark, leafy greens are particularly important to eat during pregnancy as they are high in minerals and folic acid, all essential nutrients for mom and baby. Folic acid is one of the most important nutrients for preventing birth defects, especially of the nervous system. A minimum dose for supplementing would be 800 micrograms. However, no toxicity has been found at much higher doses.

Healthy oils are extremely important for the development of the fetus, especially for the brain. Besides taking a good Omega 3 supplement twice a day (one that includes the good fat GLA is even better), include olives and their oil, avocado, coconut, coconut oil, and coconut milk, and nuts and nut butters (almonds, walnuts, macadamia and brazil nuts). If the mother keeps her levels of these fats high, she will stand a better chance of avoiding postpartum depression after the birth and will give her baby’s brain a healthy start that will benefit the child for years to come.

Whole grains add the fiber and B vitamins so vital to a healthy baby and mom. Look for grains that are in their **whole** form. They can be used for breakfast or as a delicious side dish at lunch or dinner as a pilaf. Ask your doctor if you need to test your B vitamin status. Many people are very deficient in these vitamins or lack proper enzymes to absorb them. You may need an extra supplement of B-Complex on top of your prenatal multi. Vitamin B6 is essential to help minimize morning sickness and all of the B vitamins are necessary to maintain a healthy pregnancy without complications.

Your need for calcium doubles during pregnancy. Generally you should supplement with at least 1000 mg. of calcium chelate along with 750 mg. of magnesium and some Vitamin D3 to help absorb the calcium. This ensures good bones and few muscle cramps for mom and good bones for baby. Foods rich in calcium include dairy products, sesame seeds and tahini, broccoli, dark leafy greens, beans and nuts.

Vitamin C is also important in alleviating morning sickness. However doses over 2000 mg. are not recommended as the baby may become dependent on this high dose and have withdrawal at birth.

Zinc is another mineral that is key to a healthy pregnancy, as deficiency may increase risk of miscarriage and complications as well as an infant with a poorly developed immune system. Foods high in zinc include seafood, meats and dark meat poultry, wheat germ, eggs, whole grains and oatmeal.

Gestational diabetes is a growing risk, so it makes sense to eliminate sugary foods as well as artificial sweeteners. These foods tend to dull the appetite for more nutrient-dense foods and the artificial sweeteners can trick the body into wanting more sweets and trigger a blood sugar problem. Caffeine is another substance to limit to one cup per day. Alcohol should be eliminated altogether during pregnancy.

Drink plenty of clean, non-chlorinated water, and exercise moderately according to your doctor's instructions.

Common sense and good nutrition will help you have a healthy, enjoyable pregnancy.

The information in this article is not meant to take the place of medical advice, but is offered as a general guide to what your body needs during pregnancy. Consult your obstetrician for more specific advice.

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