



Pregnancy and Breastfeeding

INTRODUCTION

During pregnancy your nutritional needs change. It is important to be aware that what you eat during this time has significant impact on your developing child. One tends to think of nutrition as being personal to our own lives, but during pregnancy the nutrition of the mother is critical – not only to herself but also to the health and development of the baby she is carrying. Also, it is now thought that nutrition in early life affects the health of the individual for many years to come, so what a mum eats during pregnancy could have far-reaching long-term effects on her baby. What a responsibility!

Appetite and tastes often change during pregnancy and although it is good to understand what your cravings can indicate, it is also important to ensure the intake of important nutrients is maintained to make certain your baby gets all it needs for growth without depleting you of your own stores of vital nutrients.

NUTRIENTS DURING PREGNANCY

During pregnancy your body requires extra protein, vitamins and minerals in order to support your growing baby and to allow for changes in your own body. As a rule you will need 50% more vitamins and minerals, but you will only need to increase your calorie intake by 10% - 15%. (A longitudinal study – the only one of its kind – on Food and Nutrient intake of pregnant women, published in the Journal of Nutrition and Dietetics in 1994, concluded that the intake of nutrients in the diets of pregnant women in each trimester was deficient in meeting the recommended dietary allowances).

THESE ARE THE PRIMARY AREAS OF NEED:

Energy

Be careful! You do not need as many calories as you might feel you want. In general you will need about 300 calories per day extra, beginning in the second trimester.

If you are still physically active you may need more, but it is all too easy to put on too much weight during pregnancy, because many women find that they are constantly hungry.

If you find this is happening to you, listen to your body because it might be telling you that you are short of vital nutrients, such as minerals. Mineral satiety will often reduce excessive hunger.

Protein

Protein is made up from amino acids, which are the building blocks of all the cells in both your own body and that of the growing baby. When you are pregnant you must ensure you get enough protein, particularly in the second and third trimesters when the baby is growing fastest. Protein recommendations during pregnancy are for an additional 10 – 15 grams per day. This should average a total of about 60 grams per day. If you are vegetarian or vegan and omitting meat, eggs and dairy from your diet, you need to ensure you replace these with protein-rich foods such as soy, tofu, beans, pulses, seeds and nuts. (See 'Being a Vegetarian - Healthily' leaflet)

Fats

Do not reduce your fat intake during pregnancy. Both you and your baby need essential fats during this time and your baby in particular needs polyunsaturated fats to form healthy skin and vision. The most beneficial fats at this time are omega 3 polyunsaturated fats, which include fatty acids found in fish and flax seeds. Monounsaturated fats are also important and the best source of these is olive oil.

Studies have shown that the omega-3 chain fatty acids (DHA in particular) may lower a woman's risk of depression, aid foetal visual development and even help to regulate the sleep patterns of the new-born. There are many published studies linking DHA to normal brain development in the unborn child. (See 'Fish Oil' leaflet)

Minerals

It is really important to ensure you have sufficient essential mineral intake during pregnancy, both to support your own body and your baby. Mineral status in early life is a great biomarker of future health. Mineral deficiency, therefore, is likely to create a predisposition to ill health, both for you, post pregnancy and for your baby. Try to follow the dietary advice given and consider topping up with a safe and gentle multi-mineral (and vitamin) formula as a safeguard.

The minerals zinc and selenium are important at all stages of life for the support they give to our immune systems, but also particularly important during pregnancy are the following:

Iron:

Anaemia can be a problem during pregnancy regardless of diet because the developing foetus will draw on the mother's iron stores to create stores of its own, required for the healthy formation of red blood cells. Also, maternal blood volume increases by 50%, therefore iron is needed in larger amounts, particularly in the later stages. Eat foods rich in iron such as dark green leafy vegetables, dried beans and legumes and dried fruits. If you are a meat-eater you will find it easier to keep your levels topped up as "haem iron" (iron from blood in red meat) is absorbed much better than vegetable iron.

Calcium, Magnesium and Vitamin D:

Calcium, magnesium and phosphorus are in great demand during pregnancy. Intestinal absorption of calcium doubles early in pregnancy and the mineral is stored in the mother's bones. Later, as the foetus begins to develop, the mother's stores are drawn upon. Dark green leafy vegetables and low fat cheeses are good sources of calcium. Calcium works with vitamin D in bone and teeth development.

Vitamins

Good vitamin intake is important for mother and growing baby for the protection and optimum health of all body cells. Vitamin C is always important in its protective capacity and vitamins B12 and B6 are needed for the production of red blood cells during pregnancy.

Folic acid is vital. Not only is it needed by the baby for the development of the neural tubes but also by the mother, and shortage can lead to a condition called megaloblastic anaemia that occurs in the last trimester of pregnancy.

The FDA (in America) feel it is so important that it is now added to pre-packaged bread and cereals in a quest to ensure people get sufficient. The RDA is 200µg but pregnant women and those of child-bearing age are recommended to take 400µg.

DIET AND LIFESTYLE ADVICE

Try to eat a whole food diet including organic fresh fruit, vegetables, nuts and seeds daily. Include beans and pulses and oily fish such as salmon, anchovies or herring a couple of times a week. Avoid processed foods wherever possible. Get into the habit of eating small meals little and often, which will be more comfortable and easier for you when the baby gets larger and begins to press against your stomach. If you are craving strange things such as pickled onions or peanut butter, try to fathom out what your body really wants. Most often, a high salt food craving is linked to mineral need or in some cases is indicative of the need for constitutional prescribing by a qualified homeopath. A peanut butter craving is likely to mean a need for B vitamins, bacon is often a fat need (or could be a salt craving), cheese is likely to be calcium and phosphorus, and pickled onions is usually the salt content – so think of topping up on all minerals here.

Avoid drinking alcoholic beverages if you can. Coffee is a stimulant, which is also best, avoided – it is also a diuretic.

Drink plenty of fluids, especially water, during pregnancy. A woman's blood volume increases dramatically during pregnancy. Good nutritional intake and a healthy lifestyle will help lead to a healthy mother and healthy baby! (See 'Healthy Eating Plan' leaflet)

HOMEOPATHY

Homeopathy is safe to use during pregnancy and breastfeeding and can resolve the problems often associated with these times. Remedies can be used during labour and delivery and Childbirth Remedy Kits are available. A book that I would recommend is Miranda Castro's 'Homeopathy for Mother and Baby' which covers many of the problems that might arise during pregnancy, birth and the post-natal year. Problems that do not resolve would benefit from treatment by a qualified homeopath.

Please speak to Pauline about this and for advice regarding recommended suppliers and supplement advice.

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