

# Nutrition In Pregnancy

## Food for Conception and Pregnancy



Food cravings, especially salty or sweet food, can be a sign of nutritional deficiencies. It is important to balance any deficiencies prior to conception and pregnancies, and can be done by utilizing some basic foods. Below is a list of vitamins and minerals you should be consuming, and foods to include in your diet!

### Food Actions

#### Yang

- Warming
- Sweet or Pungent
- Energizing
- Ascending Energy

#### Yin

- Cooling
- Salt, Bitter, or Sour
- Building flood + fluids
- Descending Energy

### A Few Important Reminders

- Chinese dietary therapy suggests that pregnant women should eat according to their intuition.
- Notice: what is your body looking for or craving? Some can be a sign of deficiency in a certain nutritional area – notice that!
- Vegetarians will often find themselves drawn to dairy foods, eggs, fish and even chicken.
- Always remember: nutrients tend to work in combination! That's why fresh, whole foods, are essential as they contain a variety of nutrients that are essential in pregnancy
- Supplements also play a role in optimum nutrition, so be sure to listen to guidance from your practitioner!
- You are encouraged to eat a variety of foods, but bitter herbs should be avoided.

## What is Happening Each Month

### First Trimester (1-3 months)

- This tends to be seen as the most crucial stage in the baby's development.
- All organs of the baby's body, as well as hands, feet and limbs are formed.
- Baby has many rapid growth spurts during that time.

- **Vitamin A**
  - Vital for proper fetal growth, particularly the development of the eyes
  - It needs to work in balance with other nutrients, especially zinc, B-complex and vitamins C, D, E.
  - *Good food sources: These include fish oils, egg yolk, butter, cheese and yoghurt, carrots, spinach, red peppers, tomatoes, broccoli, apricots, and mangoes.*
- **B-Vitamins**
  - B-vitamins should always be taken as a b-complex (with other b-vitamins) since functions are linked
  - Deficiencies have been linked with birth abnormalities like cleft palate and shortened limbs.
  - *Good food sources: These include brewers yeast, molasses, egg yolks, whole grains, wheat germ, rice, legumes and green vegetables, bananas, papaya, dried peaches and prunes.*
- **Folate**
  - Is necessary for the production of new DNA, which is needed for new cells
  - Prevents neural tube defects and increases birth weight.
  - *Good food sources: Liver, egg yolks, legumes and dark green vegetables.*
- **Vitamin C**
  - Helps boost the immune system and increase resistance to viruses and toxins
  - Is needed to make healthy collagen (the body's connective tissue) and aid the absorption of iron and zinc, and prevents anemia
  - Deficiency has been linked to miscarriage
  - Note: Vitamin C is lost in storage
  - *Good food sources: These include citrus fruits, blackcurrants, melons, pineapples, bananas, raspberries, apples, pears, prunes, tomatoes, potatoes, green peppers, green vegetables such as Brussels sprouts, kale, broccoli, parsley, alfafa and rose hips.*



- Vitamin E
  - Is important in the development of the heart
  - Helps get oxygen to cells and to protect RNA and DNA from damage that could cause congenital defects in the baby
  - Helps the utilization of fatty acids and selenium
  - Good food sources: These include unrefined cold-pressed oils, wholegrains, wheat germ, nuts, green leafy vegetables, avocados, molasses and eggs.
- Iron
  - Iron is needed to make hemoglobin, the substance in the red blood cells that carries oxygen
  - The volume of blood increases during pregnancy to help get oxygen to the placenta
  - Deficiency can lead to weakness, excessive tiredness, depression, headache, confusion and memory loss
  - Note: Iron supplementation on its own is not effective and is best paired with Vitamin C to absorb the iron
  - *Good food sources. These include molasses, wholegrains, wheat germ, lean red meat, poultry, almonds, egg yolk, wholegrains, avocados, dried fruit like figs, currants and apricots, green leafy vegetables such as spinach, broccoli, watercress and parsley.*
- Zinc
  - Helps to prevent birth defects and low birth weight in newborns
  - Needed for cell division and growth
  - Helps to maintain hormone levels and keep immune system healthy
  - Deficiency inhibits metabolism of vitamin A, and may be one cause of morning sickness
  - Note: best dietary sources are meat and poultry
  - *Good food sources. Meat and poultry, fish, shellfish (particularly oysters), ginger, sunflower, sesame, pumpkin and sprouted seeds, almonds and other nuts, soya beans, fruit, leafy vegetables, watercress, wheat and oat germ, wholegrains and brewer's yeast, the citric acid in oranges increase zinc absorption.*

- Foods to avoid. These include saturated fats (from animal sources) which provide energy but should only be eaten in small quantities or in low fat forms, such as skimmed milk, lean meat and low-fat cheese. Processed foods tend to be high in saturated fat.

### Preventing Morning Sickness

Nausea during pregnancy may be a sign of deficiencies and supplementation of certain B-vitamins, folic acid and the relevant minerals will help in most cases.

### Second Trimester (2-6 months)

- Change in woman's shape becomes much more noticeable
- Early feeling of nausea and tiredness usually is passing and appetite increasing
- Avoid "eating for two". Eat healthily, however too much excess weight will be harder to lose
- Baby is growing! Its organs are maturing, bones are hardening and air passage is developing

- Vitamin A
  - Vitamin A is needed for healthy eyes, hair, skin, teeth, mucous membranes and bone structure. It is linked to neural tube defects in still births.
- B-Vitamins
  - Stress, infection, pregnancy and lactation can increase our need for b-complex.
  - B-vitamins can also help us to use and absorb other vitamins and minerals
  - Deficiency during pregnancy can lead to a loss of appetite and vomiting
  - Are needed for energy and metabolism of carbohydrates and for the baby's developing nervous system.
  - Vitamin B3 helps to form serotonin, an important neurotransmitter that helps with sleep and mood.



- Vitamin C
  - The need for vitamin C increases in pregnancy
- Vitamin D
  - Vital for healthy bones and teeth
  - Aids the absorption of calcium and phosphorus
  - *Good food sources: Whole milk, free range eggs, fish oil and fatty fish.*
- Vitamin E
  - Vitamin E helps get oxygen to the cells and helps to keep skin supple.
- Vitamin F (essential fatty acids/EFAs)
  - Form a large part of the membranes of all cells and give rise to prostaglandins (used to make adrenal and sex hormones and which affect all the body's systems).
  - Aid in the absorption of nutrients and activate many enzymes.
  - EFA deficiency may be a contributory factor in pre-eclampsia
  - *Good food sources: nuts, unrefined oils, nuts like brazils, nut butters, green leafy vegetables, seeds such as sunflower and linseed, oily fish such as herring, mackerel, tuna, sardines and salmon.*
- Calcium
  - Calcium requirements increase over 3x during pregnancy
  - Forms strong bones and teeth in baby, help muscles grown, and control nerve and muscle function
  - Deficiency is associated with low birth weight and low scores on developmental tests
  - Premature babies are often found to have low levels
  - *Good food sources: These include wholegrains, nuts, dairy products, carob, dolomite, and green leafy vegetables.*
- Chromium
  - Needed to make the glucose tolerance factor (lowers blood sugar levels)
  - Not easily absorbed but it is readily lost by the body, especially in those with a high intake of sugar
  - *Good food sources: These include brewer's yeast, molasses, wholegrains, wheat germ, vegetables, butter.*

- Iron
  - Iron is in great demand from the growing baby and a woman's stores may be quickly used up
  - Number of red blood cells increases by 30% during pregnancy.
  - Deficiency can lead to poor memory, sluggishness and tiredness
  - In the fetus, iron deficiency can cause defects in the eye, bone and brain, and slow growth, as well as being a factor in neonatal mortality
- Magnesium
  - Works with calcium to create strong bones and teeth – both are essential for the development of baby's muscles and nervous system.
  - Deficiency may be characterized by muscle cramps and twitching, insomnia and depression
  - Low levels are also associated with premature and low birth weight babies

### Sources

- Morell, S. F., Cowan, T. S. (2013) *The Nourishing Traditions Book of Baby & Child Care*. Washington, DC. New Trends Publishing, Inc.
- West, Z. (2001). *Acupuncture in Pregnancy and Childbirth*. London, UK: Churchill Livingstone.

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