

Vitamins and Minerals During Pregnancy

Folic acid (Folate)

Folic acid prevents the fetus from being affected by neural tube defect. Pregnant women should consume foods that are rich in folate or take supplement containing folic acid.

Major food sources of folate:

Dark green vegetables, legumes & beans, fruits, liver, nuts and folate-fortified breakfast cereals

Vitamin A

Colorful fruits, oranges and dark green leafy vegetables, such as cherries, tomatoes, pumpkins, carrots, and sweet potatoes, are rich in beta-carotene which can be turned into vitamin A in the body. Increase consumption of colorful vegetables and fruits, eggs and milk to provide adequate vitamin A for both you and your baby. Excessive intake of vitamin A can cause birth defects. Talk with your doctor if you plan to take vitamin A supplements.

Iodine

Iodine deficiency may cause the baby's brain damage. Demand for iodine increases during pregnancy; The World Health Organization recommends pregnant women should consume 250 mcg iodine daily. As it is difficult to get sufficient iodine from food alone during pregnancy, consider taking a prenatal multivitamin/mineral supplement that contains iodine.

Iodine-rich food:

Seaweed, kelp, sea fish, seafood, egg yolk, milk or milk products, containing iodine salt (Kelp particularly contains a very high level of iodine. Consume kelp in moderation.)

Iron

Adequate iron intake ensures normal fetal growth and brain development, and prevents anemia during pregnancy and after delivery.

Iron-rich food:

Meat, eggs, dark green vegetables, nuts, dried beans, added iron breakfast cereals



Calcium

Pregnant women require 1000 mg calcium daily. Inadequate calcium intake during pregnancy may increase the risk of preterm labor and gestational hypertension. Pregnant women are advised to consume 2 glasses of milk or calcium-fortified soy milk daily, and choose calcium-rich foods, such as dairy products, dark green leafy vegetables and tofu.

Calcium-rich foods: Milk and dairy products, calcium soy milk, tofu, dark green vegetables, sesame seeds and nuts, shrimp, fish eaten with bones

Vitamin C

Vitamin C helps the body absorb iron from plant foods sources. Eat more fresh vegetables and fruits.



Omega-3 fatty acid

Omega-3 fatty acids include DHA and EPA. DHA is important for the brain and eyes development of your baby. Pregnant women should eat moderate amounts of fish rich in omega-3 fatty acids, such as salmon, sardine, jade perch, eel and yellow croaker. Vegetarians and others who avoid fish can consume foods rich in alpha linolenic acid (ALA), such as flaxseeds, walnuts and canola oil. DHA and EPA can be made from ALA in our body to a certain extent. Talk with your doctor if you consider taking DHA supplement.

Vitamin D

During pregnancy, expose to sunlight regularly and consume vitamin D rich foods; this helps you get enough vitamin D for your baby's bone development. In summer, 5 to 15 minutes of sun exposure of hands, face and arms, about 2 to 3 times a week is sufficient to keep vitamin D level high. People with darker skin need longer sun exposure. In winter, the sunlight is generally less strong so you may need longer sun exposure time. As diet alone is usually not sufficient to meet your need of vitamin D, you can obtain some vitamin D by eating fatty fish, such as salmon, sardines, eel, eggs, liver, milk and milk products added with vitamin D. Talk with your doctor if you consider taking vitamin D supplement.



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