

## Pregnancy and Pre-natal Vitamins

Pre-natal vitamins are important to the health of a growing baby. They are also important to pregnant mothers because their bodies are going through so many changes. Our diets today are often deficient in key nutrients found in pre-natal vitamins that help a baby's development in the womb. One deficiency that has been found is the lack of enough folic acid, one of the B vitamins. Rectifying vitamin deficiency can be done by modifying your diet and by taking pre-natal vitamin supplements. It is easiest for your body to absorb nutrients from foods, but since it can be difficult to take in enough of those key vitamins and minerals during pregnancy, most doctors recommend that you also take pre-natal supplements. The most important pre-natal vitamin is folic acid, which is the synthetic form of the naturally occurring folate. If folic acid is taken in the first four weeks of pregnancy, it can reduce the risk of the baby having an incomplete spinal column, or neural tube defect by up to 70%. Because folic acid is most useful very early in the pregnancy, most doctors recommend that women trying to conceive begin supplementing their diet with 400 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid per day. In fact the U.S. Public Health Service recommends that all women of childbearing age take this supplement as a preventative measure, in the case of an unplanned pregnancy. Many once-daily multi-vitamin supplements include this in their product. While folic acid is most important in the first trimester, most doctors recommend it throughout the pregnancy. Spinach and chicken liver are great natural sources of folate. Folate is often added to breakfast cereals and breads; this addition will be written on the nutrition label. Calcium is another critical supplement for your baby for the same reasons that it is important for you; calcium helps the baby develop strong bones and teeth. One of the best sources of calcium is cheddar cheese (real cheese, not the plastic-like "cheese product" made from hydrogenated oil with orange color added). Calcium is also found in yogurt, milk, kale, etc. In addition to dairy products, calcium citrate is often added to cereals and other non-dairy products like orange juice. When taking calcium supplements it may be safest to take calcium citrate which is made from citrus fruit. Small amounts of vitamin D are important for calcium absorption. The good news is that you can absorb this vitamin through exposure to the sun. Most prenatal supplements provide this vitamin. Iron is important for the baby's development of red blood cells, which deliver oxygen to the baby. Supplementing iron into your diet is mostly important for the mother's health. Insufficient iron might lead to fatigue and anemia. On the other hand, too much iron can hurt both the mother and the baby. Be very careful with iron supplements! The baby will generally get all of the iron he needs, even if that means leaving the mom anemic. By the end of the pregnancy a mother will have twice as much blood in her body as she did before. Therefore pregnant women may need more iron as non-pregnant women. Another important fact is that coffee and tea can decrease iron absorption. The best and safest way to get the right amount of iron is to take the balance multi-vitamin and mineral pre-natal supplements that your doctor recommends. You might save money if you ask your doctor which over the counter pre-natal vitamins may contain the same ingredients as prescription versions. Pre-natal vitamin supplements are even more important for women who have poor nutrition, women who are carrying twins, and women who have a closely spaced pregnancy. For women that are healthy and eat a balanced diet, pre-natal supplements are still important to insure against the possibility that the women are not getting enough of any given nutrient. Many women who were careful to eat right were still found to be low in folic acid for example. Vitamin supplements, in particular those with iron, can be tough to swallow for the expecting mother because of the infamous 'morning sickness,' that is far from relegated to the morning hours. Many women have found that beginning to take pre-natal vitamins a month or more before conception can diminish morning sickness and therefore make taking the pre-natal vitamins during pregnancy an easier pill to swallow. Taking prenatal vitamins when you are not pregnant does not cause any problems. These vitamins are not that different than regular daily multi-vitamins, except that they do not contain any herbs or herbal supplements that could cause problems. Be very careful to avoid most herbal supplements when pregnant. Talk to your doctor. Note: These statements have not been evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration. Supplements are not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, mitigate or prevent any disease. All information here is intended for general knowledge only and is not a substitute for medical advice or treatment for specific medical conditions. You should seek prompt medical care for any specific health issues and always consult your doctor before starting any new supplement, diet or fitness regimen.

## About the Author

Free online fitness tracker, basic facts and useful fitness calculators to help you lose weight.

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