

Nutrition During Pregnancy and Lactation

A good diet is vital to health during pregnancy. It is essential to understand the importance of nutrients in the body. Eating nutritious foods is one of the most significant ways in which you can contribute to the health of your newborn baby, enjoy your pregnancy, and have an easier labour and birth. Whatever you take into your body has an effect on the fetus. These foods form the building blocks of growth and development; what you provide nutritionally for yourself you provide for your growing baby and what you lack your baby lacks also.

Eating a nutritious "well balanced diet" is easier said than done. One hundred years ago we may have been able to get all the nutrients we needed from our foods, but today with mineral depleted soils, the effects of the current "agribusiness" and highly processed foods, obtaining all we require from these foods is often difficult. A high quality diet is needed to maintain your own health and the best possible conditions for the baby to develop. Read labels, know what you are buying. If your diet could use some improvements, pregnancy is a good time for change and well worth the effort. Try not to give "convenience" foods a high priority even if you have a busy life. Remember you are not eating for two. Here are some basic guidelines:

- A natural whole foods diet is the best one to adequately meet your needs during pregnancy. Whenever you can, eating organic foods, fruits and vegetables is highly recommended because they contain higher vitamin and mineral contents.
- Eat a large variety of fruits and vegetables 4 - 5 servings per day
- Fluids are very important - drink at least 6 - 8 glasses of water each day. Do not drink large amounts of fruit juice, if you drink juice, dilute with water.
- Protein requirements 2 - 3 servings per day. Sources are; beans, eggs, fish, low fat cheese, yogurt, organic poultry, lean organic meats, nuts, seeds.
- Whole grains and carbohydrates 3 - 5 servings.
- Minimise sugar intake, especially ice cream, baked goods, chocolate.
- Ensure that iron rich foods are included in your diet. These include dark leafy green vegetables, beans, dried fruit, blackstrap molasses, whole wheat products, tofu, millet, parsley, nutritional yeast, beets, grapes, miso, dulse, fish, & poultry.
- Avoid foods with "empty calories" i.e. without nutrients; refined carbohydrates, sugary treats, pop, "junk food", highly processed or convenience foods.
- Moderate your caffeine intake. One cup of coffee or tea per day is fine.
- Please avoid tobacco, alcohol, marijuana, aspirin, laxatives and most over the counter drugs. Please discuss concerns you may have with your midwife.
- A low fat diet is healthier - avoid fatty, fried foods.
- Do not make dairy products a main staple in your diet. Calcium requirements can be met with calcium rich foods and supplements. Calcium supplements should be taken in combination with magnesium; 2 parts calcium and 1 part magnesium.
- Eat regularly throughout the day. Smaller, more frequent meals are easier for your digestive system and will keep your blood sugar levels stable.