

INFORMATION SHEET

Preparing for Pregnancy - DIET

expert care for women

When you are pregnant your body needs more vitamins and minerals. A healthy diet before a pregnancy will give your body a good store of vitamins and may help your body cope with nausea and vomiting during the early phase of pregnancy, often known as morning sickness, when you may be unable to eat much food.

What should I ensure I include in my diet?

It is important to keep a well balanced diet and incorporate the five food groups which include:

- breads, cereals, rice, pasta and noodles;
- vegetables and legumes;
- fruit;
- milk, yoghurt, cheese, and
- meat, fish, poultry, eggs, nuts and legumes.

Before and during pregnancy it is important to ensure your diet is:

- rich in calcium, folate, iron, niacin, thiamine, vitamin C and zinc, and
- high in fibre and protein.

It is important to begin taking a folate supplement at least one month before pregnancy and continue taking the supplement for the first three months of pregnancy. Folate may help prevent the risk of babies developing neural tube defects.

Is there anything I should avoid when preparing for a pregnancy?

Caffeine may reduce fertility, so it is recommended intake be limited to 200mg per day, approximately two cups of coffee or four cups of tea.

Smoking can also affect fertility and the health of your baby, so it is recommended you and your partner cease smoking at least four days prior to trying to conceive.

Alcohol may increase the risk of miscarriage and harm brain development of the baby, so it is recommended to be avoided.

Once you are pregnant you should not have excessive amounts of vitamin A.

It is also important to avoid foods which may cause listeriosis.

Do women who have diabetes need a specific diet when they are preparing for pregnancy?

It is important to women who have diabetes to have good diabetic control and should ensure they are following the diet recommended by their health care practitioner. Once a woman with diabetes is pregnant it is important that she has a diet consistent with the general recommendations for a normal healthy pregnancy.

Are there other women who may need special dietary advice when they are preparing for pregnancy?

Woman who adhere to a vegetarian or vegan diet should ensure they have adequate intake of protein. It is important to ensure women have enough B12 to prevent neurological risks to the baby. Your obstetrician can provide further advice.

Women who have an eating disorder, such as anorexia or bulimia are at high risk of nutritional deficiencies that may put the health of their baby at risk. Please discuss the situation with your obstetrician.

Should I take a multivitamin supplement?

It may be a good idea to take a multivitamin suitable for pregnancy. Taking a folate supplement is certainly recommended. Iodine is very important during pregnancy and breastfeeding for the normal development of a baby's brain and nervous system. Please speak to your doctor about what supplements you should take.