



Homebirth Services in Central Vermont

## **Nutrition In Pregnancy**

A diet rich in a variety of whole foods is an important part of a healthy pregnancy. There is an incredible amount of growth taking place in the development of a new human being, requiring extra nutrients. There is a need for about 300 extra calories a day, plus additional quantities of some specific nutrients.

Folic acid, calcium, iron, protein and vitamin B-12 are specific nutrients that are critical during pregnancy. Folic acid can lower the risk of your baby being born with a neural tube defect such as spina bifida. Since it is especially important in the first trimester (1-12 weeks), consuming 400-800 ug per day is recommended. If possible, starting a few months before conception is best. It is found in foods such as dark leafy green veggies, legumes, nuts, oranges, brewer's yeast and asparagus.

Calcium is an integral part in the development of the baby's bones and teeth. Adequate calcium intake can also help the 'mother-to-be' prevent osteoporosis years down the road. During pregnancy the recommended amount of calcium intake per day is 1200-1500 mg. You can get some of this from food sources such as dairy products, almonds, hazelnuts, sunflower seeds, molasses, broccoli, kale, bok choy, collard greens, acorn squash, tortillas, chickpeas, and pinto beans. It would be prudent to supplement a good diet with at least 600 mg per day. Liquid calcium is the most absorbable form, followed by calcium citrate in pill form.

Iron is a key element for transporting oxygen in our blood. It is stored in an unborn baby's liver to be used during its first six months of life. If your hematocrit (blood iron level) is mildly low, it can be increased through foods. Sources high in iron are green leafy veggies, egg yolks, raisins, prunes, pumpkin seeds, molasses, liver, red meat and oysters. Vitamin C aides in iron absorption and cooking acidic foods such as apples or tomatoes in cast iron dramatically increases their iron content. A tea can be brewed by steeping ½ cup nettles, ¼ cup alfalfa, and ¼ cup yellow dock in 1 quart of hot water and drink 4 cups a day. If there is moderate or severe anemia it is prudent to take a



Homebirth Services in Central Vermont

supplement. Iron requirements in pregnancy vary from 30 to 120 mg depending on iron levels of the woman.

Protein is a building block in a developing baby and vitamin B-12 is necessary for its proper use. A suggested amount of protein for pregnancy is 60 to 85 grams per day. In order to get enough protein, each of your main meals and one of your snacks should have a good source. Vegetarian diets require special attention to protein and vitamin B-12. Good protein sources are tempeh, tofu, nuts, nut butters, seeds, and legumes. If it seems as though getting this much protein is difficult, protein powder is an alternative. Good sources of vitamin B-12 are milk, cheese, eggs, meat, and fish. For vegans, try spirulina, and fortified soymilk or tempeh. The recommended amount per day is 2.2 ug.

During the first trimester many women experience 'morning sickness' which usually lasts throughout the day. Small frequent meals help make this condition more manageable. Sour foods and fresh ginger can help too. After the first twelve weeks of pregnancy, most women have a big appetite. It is fine to eat to appetite, salt to taste, and drink to thirst (non-alcoholic of course). I recommend eating organic foods when possible, and avoiding heavily processed foods such as margarine, Twinkies, Cheetos and fast foods. These contain unnatural saturated fats that cross the placenta and whose health effects on babies are unknown.

On the other hand, omega 3 fatty acids are fats that are desirable in pregnancy. During the second half of pregnancy, the baby's brain goes through accelerated development. Omega 3 fatty acids are critical for this and are abundant in seafood, flax and hemp seed oils. These oils can be added to salad dressings or just sprinkled on a main dish.

A nutritious-diet, combined with fresh air, exercise and a cheerful spirit almost never fails to turn out beautiful, alert children.