

Tips for a Healthy Baby

Bringing a healthy baby to term is the goal of every pregnant woman. Many factors should be addressed when considering lifestyle changes before, during and after pregnancy. Environmental variables may affect an unborn child whether consumed, inhaled or absorbed through the skin.

Prenatal vitamins should contain DHA, calcium, iron, vitamin C, vitamin D, folic acid and other vitamins and minerals to support a healthy baby.

Women should start taking at least 400 mcg of folic acid one month before trying to become pregnant. Folic acid can prevent neural tube birth defects as such as spina bifida. Folic acid food sources include green leafy vegetables, beans, fortified bread, and citrus fruit.

DHA (docosahexaenoic acid) is important in the baby's visual, brain and neural development. DHA is found in salmon, canned light tuna and in certain prenatal vitamins with 200-300 mg/day.

Smoking while pregnant may cause the baby to have a low birth weight, heart defects, asthma, and a greater risk of SIDS. Sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) is the leading cause of death in babies between the ages of 1 to 11 months of age. The cause of SIDS is unknown, but women that smoke and consume alcohol while pregnant are risk factors.

Counseling, yoga, and stress management can help in smoking cessation. Drinking *any* amount of alcohol during pregnancy may be harmful to the baby because alcohol gets passed to the fetus. This may lead to fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS), which can cause growth and intellectual difficulties.

Vitamin D deficiency has been associated with nearsightedness, rickets, behavioral disorders, autism, and diabetes. 15 minutes of sunlight twice per week provide ample amounts of vitamin D. Washing with soap can remove vitamin D from skin. Therefore one should wait 48 hours after sun exposure before washing. Food sources include:

salmon, canned tuna fish and vitamin D fortified milk.

Estrogen maintains a healthy environment for the development of the baby. Naturally, estriol (an estrogen) increases during pregnancy to protect toxins from getting through the placenta. Progesterone helps to maintain a pregnancy until birth by preventing the uterus from contracting prematurely. Hormone levels can be checked to ensure needs are being met.

A risk factor many are aware of is heavy metal exposure. These metals may be absorbed and stored in both a mother and child's body. They are difficult to remove and may contribute to auto-immune disorders including multiple sclerosis (MS), thyroid disorders and autism.

A known source of mercury is large, predatory fish. Other fish, such as canned light tuna contain less mercury and may be consumed in moderation during pregnancy.

Another source of mercury is dental fillings. If there is concern about fillings containing mercury, check with a dentist and consider removing them before pursuing pregnancy.

Diet throughout pregnancy is important. A study of maternal diet patterns found that pregnant women who consumed a western diet (high fat, salt, oil and meat) compared to a healthy diet had children with increases in wheezing at 16-24 months.

Other dietary concerns through pregnancy include consuming raw or undercooked meats. These may contain bacteria that can be harmful to an unborn child. Deli meat may contain bacteria and should be avoided. Thoroughly washing all fruits and vegetables is advised.

One way to lower risks caused by these factors is probiotic therapy. Probiotics support the GI tract so good bacteria may prevail and counterbalance bad bacteria. This helps with processing nutrients and handling heavy metals. When the GI tract is well

maintained, yeast and fungal overgrowth is controlled.

During a normal delivery, a child is exposed to the bacterial environment of the mother. The child should receive the mother's breast milk which contains good bacteria during the first two months of nursing. This sets the child's immune system up at the start of life and can affect incidence of allergies, asthma and eczema.

Using probiotics one month before delivery and adding probiotics for children into pumped breast milk two months after delivery helps the child have a healthier gut.

Some believe up to 80% of brain chemistry originates in the gut. Setting the child up with a healthy gut may lead to better health and development.

Probiotics can be given to the child before and after vaccine administration to promote the clearance of toxins. This may be helpful due to concern regarding heavy metal content in vaccines and potential links to autism.

Presence of elevated estrogen levels in pregnant mothers may affect the child. Dietary sources that may elevate estrogen of the mother include beef and unfermented soy. Most soy products, except miso, tempeh and tofu, contain unfermented soy.

Unfermented soy contains phytoestrogens and other toxins not meant to be consumed. Soy based infant formulas contain these and when used alone supplies an infant with the equivalent of five birth control pills worth of estrogen on a dose per weight basis each day.

Researchers found lower sperm counts in men based upon the amount of beef meals consumed per week by their mother during pregnancy. Non-organic beef often contains hormones and antibiotics to enhance growth of cattle.

Elevated hormone levels from beef, soy or other sources during pregnancy have been known to cause thyroid issues, early puberty in females and delay development of males. Organic, grass fed beef consumed in

moderation may limit exposure to hormones and lead to better reproductive health later in life.

Artificial sweeteners cause health concerns when used regardless of pregnancy. They cause the brain to think that a high sugar food was consumed causing insulin levels to rise. However, non-nutritive sweeteners do not provide sugar. This causes the brain to send signals to consume food with sugar so insulin can work. Insulin promotes the storage of energy, commonly fat.

Metabolism of aspartame produces formaldehyde and methyl alcohol, known toxins. Sucralose, Splenda, causes changes to the gut flora and nutrients may be poorly absorbed and digested.

Another risk includes exposure of pregnant women to phthalate, a plasticizing agent. Studies have shown that exposure causes birth one week sooner than women who were not exposed.

Phthalates are a possible source of lower testosterone levels in male infants. Phthalate can be found in plastics including toys, detergents, rain coats and more. It is that distinct smell present in a new shower curtain.

Although overwhelming and possibly discouraging, it is possible to stack the deck to improve the chances of giving birth to a healthy baby. This information should act as a guide when making informed decisions about how to best prepare to bring a child into the world. Although a healthy child can never be guaranteed, this should make it easier to take a step in the right direction.

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