

## ***Nutrition in Pregnancy***

An excellent diet can help to prevent just about every common complication of pregnancy. Good nutrition helps to prevent preeclampsia, iron deficiency anemia, gestational diabetes, neural tube defects, preterm labor, miscarriages, placental abruption, intrauterine growth restriction (IUGR), prolonged and difficult labor, small for gestational age babies, and infection. When your diet is good, you build a healthy placenta, which is the organ that nourishes your baby. A good diet also helps you to feel your best during your pregnancy, and helps your body prepare to make milk for your baby. The quality of your nutrition during pregnancy is one thing over which you have total control. Your choices, if they are good ones, will help get your baby off to the best possible start.

In the words of Tom Brewer, MD, author of [The Brewer Pregnancy Diet](#) and pioneer in the study of the impact of nutrition upon pregnancy:

“On my list of concerns about my pregnant patients' welfare, nutrition ranks second only to breathing. The reason is simple: well-nourished women develop far fewer complications in pregnancy, have more efficient labors, and give birth more easily to healthier babies than do their poorly nourished sisters. This makes my job as an obstetrician much easier--and a lot more enjoyable!”

### **Why Do You Need to Think About Iron Deficiency Anemia?**

Pregnancy increases your iron requirements significantly over what you needed before you were pregnant. Iron is necessary for making hemoglobin, which is the protein in red blood cells that carries oxygen to the other cells. Your blood volume in pregnancy expands 30-50%, so your body needs additional iron in order to create more hemoglobin for all of that additional blood. Also, your baby and your placenta require extra iron as well. Because of our pre-pregnancy diets, many women start pregnancy without sufficient stores of iron to meet their body's increased demand during pregnancy. If your stores of iron become depleted to the point where you no longer have enough iron to make the hemoglobin, you become anemic.

“Iron is a primary need during pregnancy. Baby's muscles, blood and other tissues contain iron, protein and scores of minerals, vitamins and other factors that are supplied through the mother's bloodstream by way of digestion or her own body stores. Iron is a vital part of the hemoglobin molecule, the building block of red blood cells that enables the blood to carry oxygen to body tissues. The mother adds around one-third extra blood herself, plus the baby must create its own supply and some extra that will remain in the placenta and cord after birth.”

— From Keeping Childbearing Normal Through Nutrition by Marion Toepke McLean, CNM

### **How Do I Know If I'm Anemic?**

If you are anemic, you may not have any symptoms at all, or you may feel dizzy, tired, or suffer from headaches. You might notice heart palpitations or spots before your eyes. You may be less hungry and you may feel depressed, tired, or you may look pale.

Your hemoglobin levels will be checked during your prenatal care appointments. Your prenatal blood work panel, which is typically done at your first prenatal appointment, will test for your hemoglobin and hematocrit, and will indicate whether you are already anemic or whether you are starting your pregnancy at a good level. During your pregnancy, at about 28 and 36 weeks, your hemoglobin levels will be tested again. This is usually done with a quick finger poke. It is normal for your hemoglobin levels to drop as your blood volume expands, so expect to see

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a drop in your hemoglobin level at 28 weeks. By 36 weeks, your hemoglobin level should have increased to meet the demand of your expanded blood volume.

## **How Do I Prevent Anemia?**

Eat a diet rich in iron! Foods like meat, dried fruit, seeds, nuts, greens, lentils, beans, liver, oysters, and clams are all good sources of iron. The herbal pregnancy tea is also an excellent source of iron, and the iron from the tea is highly absorbable by your body.

## **But, I Don't Like The Tea!**

The tea is so important that you really need to find a way to make it more to your liking. Here are some suggestions:

- Try it iced! The pregnancy tea is delicious iced. If you get the plain tea, try adding a slice of lemon.
- Try sweetening it with honey or stevia.
- Use it to replace water in juice concentrates.
- Try adding juice to the tea.
- Add it to Chai Tea concentrate.
- Try freezing it in an ice cube tray and blending it with fruit juice to make a slushy.

**Bottom line – make the tea work for you, whatever it takes.** Our experience tells us that the women who faithfully drink the tea have better hemoglobin counts, bleed less, have healthier placentas, and recover faster from their births.

## **If I Do Become Anemic, What Should I Do?**

Continue to eat a diet rich in iron, as described above, and continue to drink your pregnancy tea. You may want to add alfalfa tablets, Floradix Iron + Herbs, liquid chlorophyll, yellow dock tincture, blackstrap molasses, brewer's yeast, kelp tablets, spirulina, or a strongly brewed nettles tea. Instructions for these suggestions are available in the second section of your binder. If your levels are extremely low, you may want to consider adding ferrous fumarate or ferrous gluconate.

## **How Can I Get The Most Out of My Iron Supplements?**

Iron supplement pills are not usually well absorbed by the body. The most absorbable forms of iron come from the pregnancy tea and herbal supplements listed above. You can increase the absorption of iron by taking your supplement with a vitamin C rich food like orange juice. Taking iron with a calcium-rich food, like milk or your prenatal vitamins will reduce the absorption.