



# Dr. Natalie Shaw

MBBS FRANZCOG

Obstetrician & Gynaecologist

Provider No: 2462053J

ABN: 15 363 019 239

## Nutritional Supplements in Pregnancy

A healthy balanced diet is important around the time of conception and in pregnancy. In general, most women will also take a pregnancy specific multivitamin that contains small amounts of essential vitamins and minerals.

### **Folate**

A 0.5mg folate supplement is important to take around the time of conception and for the first 12 weeks to help the baby's brain and spinal cord develop. In the first trimester, nausea and vomiting is common. The pregnancy multivitamins contain 0.5mg folate however are often large tablets and difficult to take when feeling sick. Instead, 'I-folic' (iodine and folate, a 'Blackmore's' preparation) which is a smaller tablet, can be taken until the nausea abates.

Some women will be advised to take 5mg/day of folate instead. This includes women with a family history of spina bifida, those with diabetes, obese women, women with epilepsy and women with hyper-homocysteinaemia.

### **Iron**

Iron is important for making red blood cells. Many women will become iron deficient during pregnancy and breast-feeding. This can make you feel tired and can cause anaemia. Your iron stores are checked during the pregnancy. The multivitamins contain a small dose of iron and this is usually enough for most women. Some however, will require extra supplements.

### **Calcium and Vitamin D**

The recommended daily intake of calcium is 1200mg/day. Women who cannot tolerate dairy products will require supplements. Women who avoid sun exposure may need vitamin D supplements also. The vitamin D levels and requirement for supplements are easily checked with a blood test.

### **B group vitamins**

These are required for red blood cell production and brain and nerve development. Vegetarians and vegans can be B12 deficient and so should have levels tested and be given a supplement during pregnancy and breastfeeding.



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## **Iodine**

This is essential for producing thyroid hormones. Thyroid hormone production increases by 50% early in the first trimester. Thyroid hormones are required for brain development and iodine deficiency is the commonest worldwide cause of intellectual impairment. Iodine deficiency is becoming increasingly common. Testing the individual to assess adequate iodine levels is difficult. It is recommended that pregnant and breast-feeding women have an intake of 250mcg/day. When allowing for some dietary intake, a supplement of 100-200mcg per day is recommended. Please check that your pregnancy multivitamin contains iodine as some e.g. Elevit, do not. Women with pre-existing thyroid disease will be given individualized advice.

## **Other supplements**

There is little evidence for other supplements such as Omega 3, magnesium, zinc, and fluoride.