

# **ROCHESTER AREA BIRTH NETWORK**

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## ***NUTRITION DURING PREGNANCY:***

The single most important thing that you can do for your baby is to eat a healthy, well balanced diet. A well balanced diet is one that includes foods from all food groups, in appropriate amounts, so as to ensure proper nutrition. Proper nutrition ensures that all essential nutrients (carbohydrates, fats, protein, vitamins, minerals, and water) are supplied to the body to maintain optimal health and well being. Good nutrition is essential for normal organ development and functioning, normal reproduction, growth and maintenance, for optimum activity level and working efficiency, for resistance to infection and disease, and for the ability to repair bodily damage or injury. While pregnancy is a normal alternative condition for the female body, it is stressful, and all nutritional needs are increased in order to meet the needs of the pregnancy.

Dr. Tom Brewer found through over 30 years of research that pregnant women need a well balanced, high quality diet that includes 80 - 100 grams of high quality protein, adequate salt (to taste), and water (to thirst), as well as calories from all of the food groups each day. The World Health Organization recommends that a pregnant woman eat a minimum of 75 grams of protein per day, but protein is just a marker for a nutritious diet. It must be obtained from a wide variety of whole food sources in order to get all of the important nutrients a woman needs during pregnancy. While the governments food pyramid is a good example of a well balanced diet, pregnant women need more protein and calories in general. This would mean including 2-3 servings of meat, fish, nuts or legumes, and tofu; 2-3 servings of dairy (milk, eggs, yogurt, cheese); 2 servings of green vegetables; 1 serving of a yellow vegetable; 3 fruits; 3 servings of whole grain breads, cereals, or other high-complex carbohydrates; salt to taste; and 6 - 8 glasses of clean filtered water each day. While this seems like a lot of food, it will supply the 2000 -3000 calories a day needed to make a healthy baby

A study conducted at Harvard University found that by eating at least 75 grams of protein per day pregnant women can prevent diseases of pregnancy such as pre-eclampsia (metabolic toxemia of late pregnancy). During pregnancy a woman's blood volume increases as much as 40 - 60%, and in order to reach this necessary level and maintain it she needs adequate protein, salt, calcium, potassium, and water in her diet. In April of 1996 the Journal of the American Medical Association published an article indicating that calcium may also help reduce the incidence of pre-eclampsia. Other recent research indicates that pregnant women need adequate folic acid (a B vitamin) to prevent neural tube birth defects such as spina bifida. The FDA is now recommending that breads and pastas be fortified with folic acid, to ensure that all women of childbearing age get enough. Four hundred micrograms a day is the recommended amount, and can be obtained by eating whole grain breads, citrus fruits, and dark green leafy vegetables.

As long as junk food and excessive sweets (sugar) are avoided, or kept to a minimum, weight gain should not be an issue. All of the necessary nutrients are found in a variety of natural whole foods, and if the diet listed above (or something similar) is followed,

then a woman should have little problem obtaining all that she needs from her diet. A whole food is one that is unprocessed, and is as close to its natural state as possible. While vitamin supplements are very popular these days there are risks to taking supplements of certain vitamins while pregnant (e.g., vitamin A), and others are simply poorly assimilated (e.g. calcium or iron). The B vitamins, for example, must be taken in congress (B complex supplement). As absences, insufficiencies or excesses of one or another can cause problems. It is advisable to **check with your care provider before taking anything while pregnant**, and to obtain vitamins and minerals from natural, whole sources whenever possible, to ensure quality and proper assimilation by the body. A qualified nutritional expert should assess special dietary needs.

Cravings for foods are common in pregnancy and in theory can indicate a need or deficit in a diet. Cravings for healthy foods can be indulged, but cravings for non-food substances (pica), such as clay or laundry starch can be harmful, and should be reported to your care provider.

Milk, eggs, and other dairy products are inexpensive sources of calcium and protein. Soy products, beans and nuts can be substituted for those who are vegetarian, or simply to provide variety in an omnivorous diet. Dark green vegetables provide carbohydrates, water, bulk fiber, vitamins A, C, & B, calcium, iron, magnesium, and the darker green the better. It is best to eat these vegetables raw whenever possible, but steaming or baking will also retain most of the nutrients. Citrus and berry fruits provide a great deal of vitamin C, and yellow fruits and vegetables such as cantaloupe, sweet potato, carrots and mango are good sources of vitamin A. Both of these vitamins are important for fighting infection, boosting the immune system, cell structure development, and preventing placental detachment (abruption). Zinc is another important mineral for pregnant women, as it also aids in supporting the immune system. According to the Journal of the American Medical Association zinc also helps to improve birth weight, and certain aspects of fetal development.

While a vegetarian diet is good healthy choice when well balanced, you do have to work harder to obtain all the protein needed to increase your blood supply. If a strict vegan diet is followed it may be even more difficult, but it is possible with diligence. See the supplemental reading list for sources of information on this subject.

Good sources of protein: chicken, fish, beef, pork, turkey, tofu, nuts, legumes (beans), milk, eggs, cottage cheese, whole grains, wheat gluten, soy cheese.

Good sources of whole grains include: brown rice, kasha (buckwheat groats), whole oats, whole wheat bread, whole grain cereals, quinoa, wild rice, wheat gluten, wheat germ, whole wheat pastas.

Good sources of fruits include: strawberries, kiwi fruit, apples, oranges, bananas, mangos, cantaloupe, pears, grapefruit, plums, nectarines, and peaches.

Good sources of green vegetables: spinach, broccoli, zucchini, dark green lettuces, kale, Swiss chard, green beans, asparagus, arugula, lambs lettuce.

Good sources of dairy: milk, yogurt, hard cheese, cottage cheese, eggs.

Other good whole foods include: baked potatoes, sweet potatoes, carrots, squash, green peas, soy products, corn.

Good sources of iron: red meats, organ meats, eggs, fish poultry, blackstrap molasses, cherry juice, green leafy vegetables, dried fruits (raisins, apricots, etc.).

Good sources of zinc: pumpkin seeds, squash seeds, sunflower seeds, seafood, organ meats, mushrooms, brewer's yeast, soybeans, eggs, wheat germ meats, turkey.

Good sources of folic acid: spinach, asparagus, turnip greens, brussels sprouts, lima beans, soybeans, organ meats, brewers yeast, root vegetables, whole grains, wheat germ, bulger wheat, kidney beans, white beans, salmon, orange juice, avocado, and milk.

**Sources:**

Brewer, Gail Sforza, and Brewer , Tom, MD; The Brewer Pregnancy Hotline; (2000). Kalico Communications. [www.pregnancybooksonline.com](http://www.pregnancybooksonline.com).

The Nutrition Almanac - 3rd Edition, Editor Lavon J. Dunne, Nutrition Search Inc.; McGraw-Hill Publishing; New York, 1990

Brewer, Gail Sforza, and Brewer , Tom, MD; What Every Pregnant Woman Should Know: The Truth About Diet and Drugs in Pregnancy; Penguin Books; New York; 1985.

Frye, Anne, BA Holistic Midwifery; Understanding Diagnostic Testing in the Childbearing Year; 5th Ed.; Labrys Press; Portland, OR; 1993

Frye, Anne, BA Holistic Midwifery; "Unraveling Toxemia"; Midwifery Today, #34, Summer 1995, p. 22 -24.

Frye, Anne, BA Holistic Midwifery; Holistic Midwifery, vol. 1; Labrys Press, Portland, OR; 1995.

Journal of the American Medical Association, Volume 275, number 14, April 10, 1996.

Ibid., Volume274, Number 6, August 9, 1995.

**Other Recommended Reading:**

The Brewer Pregnancy Hotline by Gail Sforza Krebs and Dr. Tom Brewer  
<http://www.pregnancybooksonline.com/>

Pregnancy, Children, and the Vegan Diet; By Michael Klaper, MD, Gentle World, Inc.; Maui, HI, 1994.

Diet for a Small Planet , by Frances Moore Lappe'

The Birth Book, by Dr. William Sears, and Martha Sears RN

The Pregnancy Book, by William Sears, MD, Martha Sears, RN and Linda Holt, MD