

Prenatal Nutrition

Sarah Seaman
MS, RDN, LD, CDCES



Q: Why is a healthy diet important during pregnancy?

A healthy diet during pregnancy is crucial because it affects an infant's prenatal development and future health - like cognitive development, bone health and oral health. Ensuring the best nutrition during pregnancy and in the first 1,000 days of a child's life is essential for promoting optimal long-term health outcomes for both mom and baby.

Q: How does a mom's prenatal diet impact herself and her baby?

If a mom has poor nutrition during pregnancy it can increase her risk of health conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure and postpartum depression. After birth, the baby may have a low birth weight, compromised immune health and potential developmental and behavioral challenges in the future.



Q: What are some of the struggles women face in accessing healthy nutrition?

Women face various challenges in accessing healthy nutrition, from food deserts to maternal health deserts. Food deserts are areas where there's a lack of grocery stores or limited access to fresh fruits and vegetables. Maternal health deserts also play a role because many women live in areas where there are shortages of prenatal health care providers, making it difficult to access quality health care.

Q: How can expectant mothers improve their nutrition habits?

Prenatal health care providers should have conversations with their patients about the importance of nutrition. Including a nutritionist as part of the patient's care team can also help women have the healthiest pregnancies possible.

Meeting the MyPlate dietary guidelines are pivotal first steps. MyPlate, introduced in 2011 as a replacement for the food pyramid, guides individuals in making healthier eating choices. Ideally, women should start focusing on healthy nutrition at least six months before becoming pregnant.

Pregnant women only need 300 more calories a day, opposing the idea of "eating for two." Monitoring calorie intake and following the MyPlate guidelines throughout pregnancy helps the mother stay healthy and ensures the baby receives the best nutrition possible.



Health care providers can help pregnant mothers achieve their nutritional goals by talking with them about the importance of a balanced diet.

Q: How can health care providers help pregnant mothers reach nutritional goals?

Health care providers can help pregnant mothers achieve their nutritional goals by talking with them about the importance of a balanced diet—proteins, fruits, vegetables, whole grains—and staying hydrated.

Health care providers should give information, in multiple languages, about nutrition and any state and federal programs that offer assistance in accessing a balanced diet. These resources can be very helpful for women who do not have access to dietitians and nutritional support.

Q: How can policymakers help pregnant mothers have access to healthy nutrition?

Policymakers play a crucial role. Programs like WIC, food stamps and state and federal funding are essential in supporting optimal nutritional outcomes for pregnant women. Policymakers should prioritize funding and promoting these programs while communicating eligibility criteria clearly.



The National Coalition for Infant Health is a collaborative of professional, clinical, community and family support organizations.

The coalition focuses on education and advocacy promoting patient-centered care for all infants—whether born preterm or full term—and their families.

infanthealth.org

