

Healthy Mom, Healthy Baby

By Allison Tannis, BSc., MSc.

Our children are our most precious treasures. Therefore, it's important that during pregnancy mothers ensure that their body and, their baby, receive all the needed nutrients to grow and develop into strong and healthy people. Each day we learn more about the link between diet and health during pregnancy. Recent research has shown that healthy moms have healthy babies. However, the science of pregnancy nutrition has not been passed on to the general population. So, let's look at some valuable nutrients for both mom and baby

For many years we've known about the importance of ensuring that mothers consume sufficient levels of folic acid to prevent neural tube defects in their children. And, more recently a study suggested that folic acid and iron may reduce the risk of low birth weight. This is important as low birth weight may be associated with obesity later in life. (APS 2003)

Proper nutrition, even before conception, is important to having a healthy baby. The *Journal of Pediatrics* noted that taking multivitamins around the time of conception may reduce the risk of birth defects in children born to diabetic mothers. Be sure to offer your body the needed nutrients even before conception.

During pregnancy, the baby gets all of its nutrients from the mother's blood stream. Avoid dieting or worrying about weight gain during pregnancy. Even modest restrictions in diet may result in premature births and long term adverse health effects for offspring. (Science 2003)

It is vital that mothers have the right nutrients in their blood during pregnancy. The best way to do this is to ensure you eat right, and take the proper supplements.

Essential fatty acids are important supplements for pregnant women. A baby's brain is about 15-20% DHA, an essential fatty acid found in fish oil. A mother's brain also contains DHA. To help minimize the potential of having post partum depression and, to ensure your baby has a healthy and happy brain, supplement with a high quality fish oil before conception, during pregnancy and while breast feeding. Be sure that the fish oil supplement you choose is rigorously tested for metals and other contaminants. Fish oil supplements can offer you a mercury free source of good fish oils.

The heart healthy benefits of fish oil are well known in adults; however, recent research is suggesting that supplementing infant formula with fish oil may prevent heart disease later in life. (BMJ 326;953) Fish consumption by pregnant women has also been associated with lower blood pressure in their offspring. Therefore, mothers should be sure to supplement with fish oil during pregnancy and when breast feeding to give their children a leg up against heart disease later in life.

Therefore, before conception, during pregnancy and while breast feeding, nutrition is vitally important to both the health of mother and child. Be sure to focus on folic acid, iron and calcium as they are commonly deficient. Choose fruits and vegetables and high quality protein to ensure proper vitamin, mineral and protein consumption. And, of course, be sure your intake of essential fatty acids is sufficient to keep both mom and baby healthy for life.