

Prenatal Vitamins

Eating a healthy diet is always a wise idea – especially during pregnancy. It's a good idea during pregnancy to also take a prenatal vitamin to help cover any nutritional gaps in the mother's diet. Prenatal vitamins contain many vitamins and minerals. Their folic acid, iron, and calcium are especially important.

Folic Acid, Iron, and Calcium

Folic acid helps prevent neural tube birth defects, which affect the brain and spinal cord. Neural tube defects develop in the first 28 days after conception, before many women know they are pregnant. Because about half of all pregnancies are unplanned, it's recommended that any woman who could get pregnant take 800 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid daily, starting before conception and continuing for the first 12 weeks of pregnancy.

A woman who has already had a baby with a neural tube defect should talk to her health care provider about whether she might need to take a different dose of folic acid. Studies have shown that taking a larger dose (up to 4,000 micrograms) at least one month before and during the first trimester may be beneficial for those women, but check with your doctor first.

Foods containing folic acid include green leafy vegetables, nuts, beans, citrus fruits, and many fortified foods. Even so, it's a good idea to take a supplement with the right amount of folic acid, as a backup. Calcium is also important for a pregnant woman. It can help prevent her from losing her own bone density, as the baby uses calcium for its own bone growth. Iron helps blood – in both the mother and baby – carry oxygen.

Look for a prenatal vitamin that includes:

- 800 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid
- 400 IU of vitamin D
- 200 to 300 milligrams (mg) of calcium
- 70 mg of vitamin C
- 3 mg of thiamine
- 2 mg of riboflavin
- 20 mg of niacin
- 6 mcg of vitamin B12
- 10 mg of vitamin E
- 15 mg of zinc
- 17 mg of iron

If Your Prenatal Vitamin Makes You Nauseous: Some prenatal vitamins can cause nausea in an already nauseous pregnant woman. If that happens to you, talk to your health care provider. He or she may be able to prescribe a different kind of prenatal vitamin – for example, some women may do better with chewable rather than those you swallow whole. In some cases, your doctor will give you a prescription for a certain type of prenatal vitamin.