

3

SUPERSTAR
NUTRIENTS
for
PREGNANCY

Congratulations—you're having a baby! While pregnancy is a time of hope, cheerful anticipation, and optimism, it can also bring about unsolicited advice that may trigger new concerns: *Am I doing this right? Is this safe for the baby? How do I ensure the best start in life for my bundle of joy?*

Doing some research and educating yourself now can help you provide a wholesome beginning for your baby. Unfortunately, the barrage of information, conflicting opinions, and endless theories available in this high-tech day and age can make an expectant mom want to go off the grid for the next 40 weeks. Have no fear—we're here to help take some of the guesswork out of the mommy blogs and "what-to-expect" forums by introducing you to three rock-star nutrients that are natural, safe, and effective for you and your baby.

Boost Brain Function with Omega-3s

No doubt you've heard about the wonders of fish oil. For years now, the health care industry has been swimming in research supporting its infinite health benefits. But when you're pregnant, your intake of omega-3s (the healthy fats in fish oil) is even more important—for both you and your baby! If it hasn't been a dietary focus for you yet, pregnancy is the time to bite the omega-3 bait.

Omega-3s are called essential fatty acids because it's "essential" that you get them from your daily diet. Your body isn't able to manufacture them on its own. EPA and DHA, two of the most prominent omega-3 fatty acids, are crucial for cognitive development during the fetal and newborn stages.

These important fatty acids have been known to promote infant intelligence, brain and nervous system development, and hand/eye coordination. They may even be able to stave off the symptoms of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

While boosting your intake of omega-3s is important before, during, and after pregnancy, the third trimester is said to be an especially crucial time to supplement your diet with essential fatty acids. This is because the brain of the fetus grows at an exceptionally fast rate during the last weeks of pregnancy. If a baby is born prematurely, it's vital that the mother continues to take omega-3s while breastfeeding in order to pass the healthy fats on to the baby. Not breastfeeding? Many infant formulas are now fortified with healthy omega-3 fats.

Foods rich in omega-3s include salmon, cod liver oil, walnuts, albacore tuna, and chia seeds. Of course, fish should be eaten in moderation while pregnant to avoid consuming too much mercury, which can be harmful to your baby. Sometimes the safest way to increase omega-3s is with a premium supplement that is free from toxicity or heavy metals.

Support a Healthy Mind with Choline

Here's a nutrient that your doctor might not tell you about. Choline is a water-soluble nutrient that's crucial for the optimal functioning of every cell in your body.

It is especially vital to the brain, liver, and nervous system, and is extremely important during pregnancy for healthy fetal development.

Researchers have noted an important connection between choline intake during pregnancy and the mental health of the baby. Choline helps brain cells develop and function normally, and is especially important during the second and third trimesters. It improves attention span and spatial cognition, helping a baby distinguish what's happening in their environment and giving them the tools they need as they



learn to navigate the world. If mental health issues run in your family, you may be interested to know that choline has even been studied to fight schizophrenia.

While increasing the intake of choline will no doubt benefit your baby, it can also do wonders for how you feel! Studies show that choline enhances motor skills for adults, as well as babies. Choline is important for supporting brain cells that are used for memory and nerve cell communication.

It has also been found to lower homocysteine levels in the body, which are responsible for inflammation, high blood pressure, and other cardiovascular risks.

Adequate choline intake is also linked to proper liver function and supports the liver's ability to regulate cholesterol, and process and remove toxins.

While the body makes a small amount of choline, it's up to you to get additional support from your diet. And women who are pregnant or breastfeeding have even higher requirements for choline. Choline is present in liver, beef, spinach, wheat germ, milk, legumes, broccoli, and potatoes, but the best source of this important nutrient is eggs. Egg yolks contain 147 milligrams of choline each.

Prevent Birth Defects with Folate

Of course, no pregnancy regimen is complete without folate (vitamin B9), referred to as folic acid in its synthetic form. This is the number one nutrient you should be taking to support healthy fetal development. Health experts agree that beginning to supplement your diet with folate up to six months before you become pregnant can significantly reduce the possibility of neural tube birth defects, like spina bifida and anencephaly. Admittedly, not all pregnancies can be perfectly planned, so increasing folate intake as soon as you learn you are expecting is extremely important.

Many doctors are quick to prescribe folic acid to expectant mothers, but the human body doesn't actually absorb or utilize this form of the nutrient in the same way it uses folate. In fact, up to 30 percent of people have a difficult time converting B vitamins like folate into the types that are required for good health. This makes it important to get folic acid in the form of folate or methylfolate, which is readily available from many foods and some high-quality supplements.

There are many folate-rich foods to choose from, including avocados, Brussels sprouts, leafy greens, broccoli, lentils, papaya, and asparagus. Make sure to add some of these healthy foods to your meals each day to increase your intake of this protective nutrient.

As you continue to research and plan for your exciting new arrival, remember to relax, eat a balanced diet, and supplement with extra nutrients—both you and your baby will benefit! ■

Supplements for Added Protection

While eating healthy and varied foods is the best way to ensure proper nutrition for you and your baby, it's not always possible to receive all the nutrients you need through diet alone. If you're looking for some extra nutritional insurance during pregnancy, your local health food store can recommend dietary supplements from a reputable company. To make the best selection, keep the following in mind:

Omega-3s: Fish and krill oils can have issues with rancidity, so look for a bioidentical extract from salmon that also contains phospholipids and peptides. A quality omega-3 supplement also contains a healthy ratio of DHA and EPA fatty acids.

Choline: Choline is often paired with B vitamins for even greater benefit. Look for a choline product that contains bioactive forms of B6, B12, and folate for optimal results. Pregnant or breastfeeding women should aim for 450-550 mg/day.

Folate: Folate is best taken in its converted form, which is called methylfolate. Look for a supplement that delivers 600-800 mcg of methylfolate daily, the recommended amount for preventing neural tube birth defects.