

Eat a Rainbow Assortment of Fruits and Vegetables

A diet rich in fruits and vegetables is the best way to ensure you and your baby get the nutrients you need. Vegetables provide the broadest range of nutrients of any food class and are great sources of vitamins, minerals, carbohydrates and protein. By selecting fruits and vegetables in a variety of colors including red, yellow, orange, green, blue and purple you give your body the full spectrum of nutrients and pigments with antioxidant effects to prevent disease. When preparing vegetables it is best to steam, bake or lightly stir-fry; unless you are making soup it is best not to boil vegetables because much of the flavor and nutrients are leached in to the water. If fresh vegetables aren't available frozen is a better option, the only exception to this is tomato products because the nutrients in canned tomato sauce, soup or paste is better absorbed by the body.

There are three vegetable categories: green leafy and cruciferous, low-glycemic and starchy. Examples from each category are attached. It is recommended that you eat 5-7 servings per day; a serving is 1 cup raw leafy vegetable like spinach or lettuce or ½ cup nonleafy vegetable either raw or cooked.

Reduce your exposure to pesticides by buying organic produce whenever possible and do not over-consume foods that concentrate pesticides like animal products including eggs, milk, meat and cheese. Try to buy free-range and organic forms of these foods.

Eat the Right Amount and Type of Protein

Protein is the second most plentiful component of our body after water. The body manufactures and uses proteins to make bones, muscles, hair, teeth, tendons, ligaments and other structures in the body. Proteins are made up of amino acids.

It is recommended that pregnant women eat 2.5 ounces of protein daily, this is only 1/3 of one ounce (or 10 grams) more than when not pregnant; the greater protein requirements occur in the second and third trimester. 2.5 ounces of protein is a little smaller than a deck of playing cards. Lactating women require similar amounts of protein as in late pregnancy. Foods rich in protein are lean meat, fish, beans, legumes (lentils, dried peas), nuts, brewer's yeast, milk, yogurt, eggs and cheese. All proteins are made up of amino acids in different combinations. Animal products are examples of complete proteins whereas plant foods often lack one or more of the essential amino acids and must be combined in order to be complete and make the proteins your body requires. It is not difficult to learn how to combine protein sources to create complete proteins.

Most Americans easily meet and exceed the protein requirements without even being on a high protein diet given the standard diet that is high in animal products. There have been numerous studies that have show the more meat and animal products consumed, the higher your risk of heart disease and cancer. There are many reasons for this association; meat doesn't contain the antioxidants that protect against cancer, it contains high levels of saturated fat and other compounds that are cancer promoting when meat is grilled, fried or broiled. Meat that is free range or wild has a much lower fat content and the type of fat (conjugated linoleic acid) present in these animals is healthy for the body and more protective against cancer.

Eat Good Fats

Fats are an important part of every cell in your body and are required for cells to be healthy. Not all fats are good and it is particularly important in pregnancy to eat the right kind of fat. So what is the kind of fat your baby needs? There are three types of fats: saturated which are found in red meats and dairy products; monounsaturated fat which is in olive oil and canola oil; and polyunsaturated including eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA).

Saturated fats can be eaten in moderation from lean meats and low fat dairy products. Fats to avoid entirely include partially hydrogenated vegetable oils and trans-fatty acids; these fats contribute to the development of many chronic diseases including heart disease and cancer and do not contribute to the health of your baby. These fats extend the self life of many foods and you must read labels to discover them. Most packaged foods

Designing a Healthy PreNatal and PostNatal Diet

can be purchased without these fats but often are in the health food section of the grocery store. Monounsaturated fats are a healthy choice. Polyunsaturated fats, particularly docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) are very important for fetal development. In fact, DHA is essential for proper brain and eye development as it is the primary structural fatty acid in the gray matter of the brain and retina of the eye. Adequate levels of DHA are important for all ages, but it is particularly important for pregnant and nursing women. Significant brain and eye development occurs while the fetus is in the womb and continues during the first year after birth. Infants rely on their mothers to supply DHA for the developing brain and eyes initially through the placenta and then through breast milk. DHA is the most abundant omega-3 long chain fatty acid in breast milk and studies show that breast-fed babies have IQ advantages over babies fed formula without DHA. Unfortunately, DHA levels in the breast milk of U.S. women are among the lowest in the world. This can be corrected by eating 2-3 servings per week of cold-water fish (salmon, mackerel, herring, halibut, etc.) or taking a high quality fish oil supplement containing DHA from Nordic Naturals, Carlson or Natural Factors to increase the level of omega-3 fatty acids available to the growing fetus.

Iron

There is a dramatic increase for iron during pregnancy which generally can be met through diet. Foods rich in iron include: egg yolk, dark molasses, whole grains, dark green leafy vegetables, raisin, prunes, brewer's yeast, nuts and red meat. If you eat a diet rich in iron it is unlikely you will develop anemia, however if you do it is best to take iron supplements between meals. Vitamin C helps the body absorb the iron whereas antacid medications make the iron more difficult to absorb.

Vegetarian Diet

There are our variations on the vegetarian diet: vegetarian who occasionally eats fish or poultry, the vegetarian who avoids meat but eats dairy products and eggs, the vegetarian who eats dairy but no meat or eggs and the vegan who avoids all animal products. It is possible to meet your nutritional needs on any of these diets during pregnancy but you have to be particularly attentive to what you eat. Of primary concern is the amount of protein and calcium in the diet. Sources of calcium that are rich in nutrients include blackstrap molasses, salmon, almonds, leafy green vegetables, sea vegetables and dairy products including milk, hard cheeses, and yogurt. It is important not to rely solely on dairy for calcium as it is often high in fat and low in other nutrients. To obtain adequate protein while eating a vegetarian diet one must learn how to combine foods to make a complete protein. The following are examples:

1. Grains, ideally whole and unprocessed, should be combined with a slightly smaller amount of beans or legumes. Examples of grains: rice, corn, wheat, millet, oats, rye, barley etc.. and examples of beans and legumes include: lentils, peanuts, garbanzo beans, kidney, pinto, black, azuki, navy and soybeans, etc.
2. Grains can be combined with dairy products
3. Nuts and seeds can be combined with beans or legumes

Additional examples of complete proteins include rice and beans, macaroni and cheese, rice and tahini (sesame seed paste), pasta with peanut sauce, whole-wheat bread with peanut butter, granola containing oats, peanuts and sunflower seeds.

References:

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