



by pediatrician Dr. Alan Greene

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## Pregnancy and Nutrition

When parents first meet their newborn babies and count their fingers and toes, everything the parents see is built from what Mom has eaten during pregnancy or before. Thankfully, this usually works out very well, even for mothers who don't pay much attention to what they eat.

Nevertheless, the often repeated phrase, "eating for two," is a reminder that the only way developing babies can get essential nutrition is through their mothers. Pregnancy provides a unique opportunity for moms to be the direct source of the vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients needed for their little ones' prenatal development.

## What To Eat When You Are Pregnant

So, what should you eat when you are pregnant? "Eating for two" doesn't mean eating twice as much. When it comes to calories, it's more like eating for 1.1, or for some women perhaps 1.2. If you had a ten ounce glass of orange juice before you were pregnant, now you might have eleven or twelve ounces — not two glasses.

Even though the need for calories only increases by ten or twenty percent, the need for some specific nutrients soars by thirty, forty, fifty percent or more. So you want to make your extra calories count by choosing at least some delicious foods packed with nutrients. A prenatal vitamin can act as a great safety net — for some things, but not all.



There are four important micronutrients not found (or not found in adequate amounts) in many prenatal vitamins. With a few simple choices for a healthy pregnancy diet, expecting moms can be sure they are getting plenty to meet the needs of their baby's body and their own.

## Nutrients Your Prenatal Vitamin May Miss

**1. Choline.** This little-known nutrient plays a key role during early pregnancy in helping to protect what will later become the brain and spinal cord. Like its better known cousin folate, getting plenty of choline can reduce the chance of neural tube defects.<sup>i</sup>

But even after the dizzying development of the first weeks of pregnancy is over, choline remains an important part of your baby's brain development. A number of studies suggest that how much choline a mother gets throughout pregnancy could have a lasting positive influence on the child's memory.<sup>ii</sup>

A healthy pregnancy diet can help ensure you are getting enough choline. Eggs are perhaps the best food source of choline. It's also found in cauliflower, asparagus, spinach, and lots of other foods.<sup>iii</sup>



- 2. DHA.** Omega-3 fatty acids, including DHA, are literally building blocks of your baby's developing brain and retina. DHA crosses the placenta in preference to other similar fatty acids and becomes the chief of these structural fats in the brain — if plenty is available.

Studies have confirmed that babies' brains are built differently depending on whether or not their mothers got plenty of omega-3 fatty acids.<sup>iv</sup>

Wild salmon is a great food source of DHA and other omega-3 fatty acids. Organic omega-3 eggs and organic milk with DHA are other ways to get extra omega-3s and can be a good addition to your healthy pregnancy diet.

- 3. Chromium.** Even small amounts of this powerful mineral can work with the body's insulin to help people maintain healthy blood glucose levels. Getting enough Chromium can be especially important during pregnancy, for both the mother and child.<sup>v</sup>

Trace amounts of chromium are found in many foods, but refined grains and cereals are lacking in them. A healthy pregnancy diet rich in whole grains and cereals will probably provide plenty of chromium.

- 4. Calcium.** When babies are born their bodies contain about 25,000 to 30,000 mg of calcium, mostly in their bones. Where does all of this calcium come from? Either from Mom's diet or Mom's bones.<sup>vi</sup>

As an added bonus, Moms who get plenty of calcium during pregnancy have been shown to help protect baby from being exposed to lead that the mother had been exposed to earlier in life, now trapped in her bones.<sup>vii</sup>

Organic milk and yogurt are rich sources of calcium. Dairy products are among the most craved foods by pregnant women and should be party of your healthy pregnancy diet.

A balanced diet of real foods, a prenatal vitamin, and paying attention to just a few nutrients that might fall through the cracks can combine to provide a great gift to yourself... and your baby.

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iii. USDA National Nutrient Database for Standard Reference, Release 23

iv. Martinez M. Tissue levels of polyunsaturated fatty acids during early human development. *Pediatr*, 1992. 120:S129-38. Makrides M, Role of long-chain polyunsaturated fatty acids in neurodevelopment and growth. *Nestle Nutr Workshop Ser Pediatr Program*. 2010;65:123-33; discussion 133-6. Epub 2010 Feb 1.

v. National Academy of Sciences. Institute of Medicine. Food and Nutrition Board. Dietary Reference Intakes for Vitamin A, Vitamin K, Arsenic, Boron, Chromium, Copper, Iodine, Iron, Manganese, Molybdenum, Nickel, Silicon, Vanadium, and Zinc (2001)

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