How to Get the Right Nutrition While Pregnant and Reduce the Risk of Birth Defects

Birth defects are some of the most puzzling health conditions that plague our modern society. In fact, experts can't pinpoint the cause of nearly 50% of these congenital disorders.

That might seem terrifying to an expectant mother, but we need to look at the silver lining. That stat could be looked at in a different way. We know—and can prevent—*more than half* of all birth defects.

What Causes Birth Defects?

There are various situations that can cause congenital disorders. One of the most common instigator is poor prenatal nutrition. Various birth defects have been linked to vitamin deficiencies.

Fortunately, by eating a vitamin-rich diet, an expectant mother can keep her baby safe and reduce the risk of birth defects.

Let's look at some of the most dangerous prenatal vitamin and mineral deficiencies.

Vitamin B2

Several health reports have found a correlation between a pregnant mom's vitamin B2 (riboflavin) deficiency and congenital heart disease. This is especially true if the mom combines the deficiency with an excess of saturated fats.

A riboflavin deficiency has also been linked to recurrent cleft lip and cleft palate among siblings.

To add more riboflavin to your diet, make sure you eat plenty of the following foods:

- Spinach
- Eggs
- Asparagus
- Almonds
- Turkey
- Milk (and other dairy products)

Vitamin B9

Vitamin B9 is more commonly known as folate (in supplement form, folic acid). A vitamin B9 deficiency can cause spina bifida and anencephaly (a fatal condition in which the brain and skull fail to develop).

Because these deficiencies usually develop within the first three to four weeks after conception, they are more difficult to prevent. In most cases, the damage has been done before the mom knows she is pregnant.

A diet rich in vitamin B9 would include:

- Lentils
- Beans (Pinto, Garbanzo, Navy, Black, and Kidney)
- Asparagus
- Spinach
- Broccoli

Vitamin B12

Another dangerous vitamin deficiency is a shortage of vitamin B12. Pregnant women who don’t consume enough vitamin B12 during pregnancy often deliver babies with neural tube defects (like spina bifida and anencephaly) or congenital

diaphragmatic hernias (a tear in the infant’s diaphragm which allows part of the abdomen to enter the thoracic cavity).

Since vitamin B12 is only found in animal products, vegan and vegetarian moms need to be especially attentive to their nutrient levels.

Vitamin B12 can be found in any animal product, but it’s in abundance in these foods:

- Sardines
- Salmon
- Tuna
- Lamb
- Beef
- Milk

Iron

The World Health Organization reports iron-deficiency anemia is the most common nutrition-based ailment in the world.

Research also shows a pregnant woman with an iron deficiency is five times more likely to have a baby born with spina bifida.

Add more iron to your diet by eating these foods:

- Liver
- Clams
- Oysters
- Beef
- Sardines
- Turkey
- Chicken
- Salmon
- Veal

Magnesium

Magnesium is a nutrient we don’t hear about too often. But just because it isn’t one of the front-runners in the media doesn’t mean it isn’t important.

Studies show increasing the amount of magnesium can reduce the odds of cerebral palsy by 45%.

To boost your magnesium levels, try eating more:

- Halibut
- Spinach
- Almonds
- Cocoa
- Cashews
- Pumpkin seeds

Do It For Your Baby!

Being pregnant is a wonderful—but stressful—time. Closely monitoring our nutrient consumption can be exhausting. But, it is important to note what is at stake if our good eating habits start to slip.

If you are worried about a nutrient deficiency, talk to your doctor. Supplements (usually in the form of a multi-vitamin) might be necessary.

Sources:

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- *Folic Acid Recommendations* by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- *World’s Healthiest Foods rich in folate*
- *Vitamin B12 Injections Help Prevent Birth Defects*

- *Lack of iron, niacin may also raise risk of birth defects* by Nutra Ingredients
- *Iron-Rich Foods* by WebMD
- *Prenatal Nutrition and Birth Defects* by Become Healthy Now
- *Magnesium Sulfate May Cut Cerebral Palsy* by WebMD
- *Good Sources of Magnesium* by Ancient Minerals