

How To Choose a Prenatal Vitamin

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A prenatal vitamin is just like a regular multivitamin but has much more concentrated dosages of certain nutrients.

Why You Should Know How To Choose a Prenatal Vitamin

To increase your odds of a successful conception, expectant mothers and couples who are trying to conceive should not fail in knowing how to choose a prenatal vitamin. Even pregnant women who eat a healthy diet and lead a healthy lifestyle should also take prenatal supplements. Supplements are meant to complement a healthy diet rather than replacing it. Studies have shown that vitamins work better when partnered with a healthy diet.

A woman's nutritional needs are significantly higher during pregnancy. Her body changes drastically during conception so as to cater to the developmental needs of a healthy baby. Such changes include increased blood volume in the body of the mother, hormonal changes and lactation. During pregnancy, estrogen levels can skyrocket to between 10 and 70 times higher than normal. Progesterone can also rise tenfold. The body also starts producing Prolactin, a hormone that promotes lactation. The uterus expands under the influence of Relaxin, a hormone produced by the placenta. Relaxin softens and relaxes the tissues near the womb thus allowing the uterus to widen which facilitates the birth of the baby.

Blood volume

In pregnant women the blood volume rises because the mother's circulatory system is supporting both the baby and the mother. Because of the baby, a mother's nutrition needs become much higher than normal. During pregnancy, the body's priority is to keep the baby alive. Without adequate nourishment and supplementation, the mother's nutrient reserves will become depleted leaving her at a higher risk of pregnancy complications, difficult delivery, post natal depression and inability to breastfeed.

Calcium

Please note that even prenatal vitamin supplements can have their deficiencies. An expectant mother has a calcium requirement of around 1,200 – 1,500 mg per day but most prenatal supplements only contain 250mg. You can compensate for this by eating a diet rich in calcium (dark leafy greens, tahini and sesame seeds) or you can take practitioner grade prenatal supplements which are more potent than the over the counter variety.

Iron

Pregnant women should monitor their iron levels. Iron deficiency during pregnancy can result in a higher risk of anemia in the baby, still birth, miscarriage, premature delivery and other complications. Even with

a normal birth the mother's iron levels can take to two years before returning to normal: iron deficiency causes extreme tiredness. Expectant mothers should take an iron supplement from around the twentieth week of gestation if their iron level is low. Too much iron, however, will cause constipation.

Buyer beware

Ordinary supplements do not contain adequate dosages to address the nutritional needs of a pregnant woman and not all prenatal vitamins deliver what they promise. You need to keep that in mind when considering how to choose a prenatal vitamin. Some report an inaccurate nutrient composition and others do not contain the dosages mentioned on the labels. Others contain nutrients which are not readily absorbed by the body. For example, the pregnant woman needs calcium: calcium carbonate is chalk, which cannot be absorbed. The cheapest supplements tend to use such cheap formulations. On the other hand calcium citrate is more expensive but is readily absorbed by the body. Always check the labels when deciding how to choose a prenatal vitamin as well as the company which makes the supplements to make sure they are of the highest and purest quality.

Independent laboratories funded by ConsumerLab.com performed tests to see which over the counter prenatal vitamin brands lived up to their claims.

The brands they recommend when deciding how to choose a prenatal vitamin are:

- Centrum Silver multivitamin
- Member's Mark Complete multivitamin
- One A Day Women's multivitamin
- Flintstones Complete multivitamin

Your nutritional status during pregnancy is critical because it largely determines your baby's health for the rest of his/her life. You should provide your baby with the healthiest start to life possible. When you want to know how to choose a prenatal vitamin I recommend practitioner grade supplements as they are of higher potency and purity than over the counter variety.

Preconception care

Preconception care should start four months before conception, so the sooner you know how to choose a prenatal vitamin the better. Regular checkups before and during your pregnancy will make it easier for your doctor to spot complications before serious health problems arise. A healthy diet and lifestyle should also be maintained at all times. Remember, during pregnancy you should consume calories for one and nutrients for two. Most women do the opposite which is why they end up gaining lots of weight which further predisposes them to delivery difficulties and gestational diabetes. To become pregnant and for the best pregnancy outcome start eating and living as a pregnant woman four months before conception (the future dad should do the same until you are pregnant).

Are you using a prenatal vitamin? What's your favorite brand of prenatal vitamins? Which ones does your doctor recommend? Would love to hear your thoughts on how to choose a prenatal vitamin!