

## **Vitamin A During Pregnancy – How Much Is Too Much?**

by Iva Keene MRMed. ND. - Qualified Naturopathic Physician - Sunday, December 04, 2011

<https://natural-fertility-prescription.com/vitamin-a-and-pregnancy/>

Vitamin A and pregnancy go together like a chicken and an egg yet there seems to be so much angst surrounding its intake before and during pregnancy. This vitamin is one of the most important vitamins for your fertility and pregnancy. However, many supplement manufacturers have reformulated their women's multivitamins and have taken it out. Why? Let's take a look at the role vitamin A plays in your body and pregnancy as well as what caused such mass-panic and drastic measures on the behalf of vitamin manufacturers. As a fertility naturopath, I prescribe vitamins on a daily basis. One of my favorite multivitamin combinations for women with infertility and those preparing for pregnancy contains vitamin A. Do you know how many times I've been asked about its safety and 'alternatives' without vitamin A? Countless times, in fact so many that I've decided to write this article!

### **Vitamin A and Pregnancy: ABC of Vitamin A**

Vitamin A is one of the most potent antioxidants we have. It belongs to the fat-soluble group of vitamins also known as ADEK (vitamins A, D, E and K). The body absorbs these fat-soluble vitamins when they're taken with fats. Examples of these fats include some nuts, oil and butter. You'll often find vitamin A in animal products such as butter, cheese, meat, fish and eggs bound to fat. Vitamin A is stored in the liver and as such, liver (from calf, chicken, cod) is one of the richest food sources of vitamin A. In this form, vitamin A is known as retinol or retinoids. Vegetable and fruit sources contain vitamin A precursors known as carotenoids. But **only 10-50% of carotenoids in the body end up converted to vitamin A**. Food sources of beta carotene are all red, orange and yellow fruits and vegetables such as pumpkins, carrots, capsicums, tomatoes and strawberries.

### **Vitamin A and Pregnancy: Why Vitamin A and Pregnancy Go Together**

**Vitamin A is crucial** for healthy eye development, good eyesight, brain, kidney, heart and lung development. In addition, fetal development of nervous, circulatory, and respiratory system require vitamin A. Is there a more crucial vitamin for your baby's development? Did you know that if you are deficient in vitamin A during the initial stages of your pregnancy, **your baby's eyes may not develop at all**<sup>[1]</sup>!

### **Vitamin A During Pregnancy: Why Did Vitamin A Get Such a Bad Press?**

The famous acne drug called **Accutane** contains a very high dose of a type of vitamin A. This resembles retinoic acid responsible for the control of embryonic development. This means that if pregnant, the body could mistakenly use this form of vitamin A in place of retinoic acid with **disastrous consequences to the fetus**. Doctors prescribe Accutane to teenagers and young women with acne. Its negative side effects are now well documented and it can be taken only if a known contraceptive is being used simultaneously. Unfortunately, **women who conceived on Accutane have miscarried or given birth to deformed**

**babies**<sup>[2]</sup>. Over time, word spread that vitamin A can cause birth defects - which it can if taken in such extremely high doses as are found in the drug Accutane. However, your intake from regular supplements and food would most likely pose no risk. But this depends on what you eat and which supplement you take. This is another important reason why *you should not self-prescribe supplements and have a professional look over your dietary habits before considering pregnancy*. If you eat calf's liver for breakfast and you take multivitamins with vitamin A you will be getting too much vitamin A. I had a case like this and this woman kept miscarrying because she had too much vitamin A. Until her dietary habits were examined, the cause of her miscarriage remained a mystery. So it's best to speak to your naturopath first.

### Too Much Vitamin A During Pregnancy: How Much Vitamin A Is Safe in Pregnancy?

- Pregnant women need around 2,500 IU.
- Breastfeeding women need around 4,300 IU.
- The safety limit in pregnancy differs between 8,000 IU and 10,000 IU.
- Some sources, such as one of the world's foremost authorities on fetal nutrition - Prof. Merlyn Werbach of the University of California says the **upper limit is 40,000 IU**<sup>[3]</sup>.
- Famous Foresight organization for pre-conceptual care in the UK recommends between 5,000 IU and 10,000 IU<sup>[4]</sup>. In over 25 years of practice, they have not had one birth deformity as a result of vitamin A intake.

As you can see even experts can't agree on what's safe in regards to vitamin A and pregnancy. Staying below 10,000 IU and ensuring that you are getting a minimum of 2,500 IU can be considered a safe zone.

### Vitamin A and Pregnancy: Betacarotene Instead of Vitamin A?

- **You need 6 micrograms of beta-carotene for one microgram of vitamin A.**
- **The body converts and absorbs only 10-50% of beta-carotene from food.**
- **Your body better absorbs beta-carotene in supplement form than beta-carotene from food.**
- **A healthy small intestine holds the key to the absorption and conversion of beta-carotene to vitamin A.**
- **Food allergies, intolerances and other issues (ex. IBS)<sup>[5]</sup> may prevent vitamin A conversion. These, along with consuming too many mucus-forming foods may predispose you to vitamin A deficiency.**

Vitamin A deficiency can lead to infertility in men and women, acne, night blindness, hardening of the cornea, flaky skin, poor immunity and a host of other health problems. So stay informed and don't partake in the vitamin A angst. Take it in its most useful form and only within safe limits. Remember, vitamin A and pregnancy go together so don't shy away from prenatal supplements with vitamin A. More importantly, speak to a trained professional before taking any supplements and vitamins - especially when planning to get pregnant! What are your thoughts on vitamin A and pregnancy? I would love to hear your thoughts!

### References

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