

INSPIRATION

Question: What can women do to make sure they have a healthy pregnancy?

Answer: Pregnant women need to pay attention to their lifestyle habits in these nine months.

Staying well in pregnancy

LEADER TO LEADER

Healthy habits always matter, but they're especially important during pregnancy. "Establishing and maintaining optimal physical health in pregnancy is important, not only so you can enjoy your pregnancy, but so you can help ensure a healthy baby," says Michele Brown, MD, an Ob-Gyn in Stamford, CT, and founder of Beaute de Maman. Here's what you need to know.

Eat well

A healthy diet is critical during pregnancy when your need for folic acid, calcium, and iron goes up. Folic acid, found in leafy greens, fortified breakfast cereals, and enriched grains, helps guard against neural tube defects in your baby. Calcium, available in milk, yogurt, and cheese, is essential for skeletal development. Iron is necessary for producing the extra blood you need and is found in lean beef and pork, dried beans, and leafy greens.

Other foods should be eaten in moderation or not at all. Limit your caffeine intake to 200 mg, or a 12-ounce cup of coffee. And steer clear



of fish high in mercury such as swordfish and mackerel and limit white albacore tuna to no more than six ounces per week.

Eye on the scale

Pregnancy requires an additional 300 calories a day to help you gain the necessary weight. "Ideally, you should be gaining about a pound a week after your first trimester," says Sarah Kilpatrick, MD, head of the department of obstetrics and gynecology at the University of Illinois.

In the end, a woman of normal weight, with a body mass index of 18.5 to 24.9 should gain 25 to 35 pounds, while an overweight woman with a BMI of 25 to 29.9 should gain 15 to 25 pounds. Underweight women should gain 28 to 40 pounds; obese women can gain 11 to 20 pounds. Gaining the right amount helps protect your health as well as your baby's.

Keep moving

Exercising 30 minutes a day most days of the week can help women prevent excess weight gain during pregnancy. Exercise can also reduce backaches, constipation, and swelling, and improve mood and sleep.

Do what you were doing before you got pregnant, then ease up gradually if needed as the weeks go by, Kilpatrick says. Sedentary women can consider taking up walking or swimming after talk-

ing to their doctor.

"The best thing to do is to try and get about three to four hours of exercise a week," Brown says.

Be alert to changes in your mood

For 10-20 percent of women, hormone changes in pregnancy can result in depression. Depression during pregnancy is a mood disorder like clinical depression and has similar symptoms such as sadness, anxiety, and feelings of worthlessness. These can be exacerbated by difficult life situations.

Untreated depression can lead to an unhealthy lifestyle, including the use of drugs, alcohol, and cigarettes, which can cause premature birth, low birth weight, and developmental problems.

"Whether experiencing depression during pregnancy or postpartum, women should seek medical attention from their health care provider," says Brad Imler, PhD, president of the American Pregnancy Association. "It is possible that the benefits of medication may outweigh any potential risk."

Imler also advises women to eat well and exercise. "Idleness and improper nutrition only exacerbate depression and make it harder to manage," he says.

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QUESTION & ANSWER

Will exposure to radiation hurt my baby?

1. Can I use a microwave oven?
2. What about a dental x-ray?

1. Emission levels of microwaves are enforced by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and well below the risk to public health. So unless the microwave door, hinges or seals are damaged, it's perfectly safe to use.

2. As long as it's done safely. Let your dentist know you are pregnant. Your dentist will cover your abdomen, pelvis and neck area with an apron that protects you and your baby.



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