

# Vitamin and mineral supplements

Before  
the baby  
Bump



**Vitamins and minerals, also called micronutrients, are important for your body to work well. Before the baby bump and during pregnancy, your body needs more of certain vitamins.**

## Key points to remember

- The best way to get the nutrients your body needs is by eating a variety of vegetables, fruits, wholegrains, dairy, and lean meats.
- Even with a healthy diet, women need folic acid and iodine supplements when planning a pregnancy.
- Taking the right dose of folic acid and iodine, as supplements, can help lower the risk of serious birth defects.
- Taking too much of a supplement (more than the recommended dose) can be harmful. More is not always better!
- Always talk to your GP, Dietitian or Pharmacist about supplements if you are unsure.

## Should you take supplements?

Eating a diet rich in a variety of foods is the best way to get the vitamins and minerals your body needs. However, when you are trying to get pregnant, some supplements can help lower the risk of birth defects and may also improve fertility.

### Folate

Folate is a b-group vitamin that helps the baby's neural tube develop properly. Low folate levels at conception and early pregnancy can increase the chance of neural tube defects (NTD), like spina bifida.

Even with a healthy diet, it is hard to get enough folate from food alone. Folic acid is the name given to folate when it is added to supplements.

Women planning to have a baby should take 400-500 micrograms of folic acid daily for at least three months before conception and during the first three months of pregnancy.

Research shows that taking folic acid supplementation before pregnancy can prevent 7 out of 10 cases of NTD.

Some women may need higher doses of folic acid, this includes women who:

- Had a previous pregnancy affected by NTD or a family history of NTD.
- Are living in a larger body or above a healthy weight.
- Are taking anti-epilepsy medication or who have diabetes.

Talk to your doctor to find the right dose for you.

### Iodine

The thyroid gland needs iodine to make hormones that support the baby's brain development. Mild iodine deficiency during conception, pregnancy, or breastfeeding can affect the baby's brain and nervous system development.

Women planning a pregnancy should take **150 micrograms of iodine daily** to support the baby's development. Iodine supplementation should start at least 1 month prior to trying for a baby and continue throughout pregnancy and whilst breastfeeding.

### Other vitamins and minerals

Depending on your lifestyle, other vitamins or minerals may be recommended by your GP or Dietitian. Some common vitamins or minerals recommended in preconception or pregnancy may include:

#### Vitamin D

Most of our vitamin D comes from sunlight. Vitamin D supplements are not usually needed during pregnancy unless a woman is vitamin D deficient. Women at higher risk of deficiency include those who:

- Have dark skin.
- Wear veils or cover most of their skin.
- Use sunscreen that blocks sunlight.
- Take anti-epilepsy medication.

### Zinc and Selenium

- Zinc and selenium are micronutrients that protect the body from harmful substances called free radicals.
- Studies show that zinc and selenium, taken alone or together, can reduce sperm damage and improve sperm quality.
- There is no evidence that taking zinc or selenium improves fertility in women. Eating a healthy and varied diet is the best way to achieve your daily zinc and selenium needs.
- Foods high in zinc and selenium include lean meats, seafood, eggs, legumes, nuts and wholegrains. Dairy is also a good source of zinc.

Women and men who are living in a larger body may need a higher dose.

If you're unsure about your supplement needs, talk to your doctor or a dietitian, as they are the health professionals with the skills and knowledge to consider your individual needs.

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