



Calcium and Iron

Dietary Sources of Calcium

Pregnant and lactating women need 1200 mg of calcium daily. If your nutritional calcium intake is not adequate, calcium from your bones is used for the baby's development. This puts you at risk for osteopenia (weak bones) or osteoporosis later in life. Foods are the best source of usable calcium. Food sources of calcium include milk and milk products, cheese, fish, and many vegetables. Other food sources are fortified breads and cereals. High fat dairy products should be taken sparingly. If you are unable to obtain all the necessary calcium from foods, a combination of foods and a moderate amount of supplement may be the best therapy. A list of common foods that contain calcium is available at www.lowmg.com/info/medinfo/general_health/bone_density_information/calcium_sources.pdf.

Calcium Supplements

If you don't ingest enough calcium in your diet, calcium supplements should be considered. Calcium carbonate provides the largest percentage of usable calcium and should be taken with meals to increase absorption. Calcium absorption is dependent on an adequate level of vitamin D (1000 IU per day). Vitamin D is added to fortified milk and occurs naturally in fish and eggs. Exposure to sunlight for 10 minutes each day also creates Vitamin D in the skin. If you have a history of kidney stones or if calcium carbonate causes gas or constipation, try calcium citrate. Calcium citrate should be taken between meals for best absorption.

Dietary Sources of Iron

Iron is a mineral that the body needs to produce red blood cells. When the body does not get enough iron, it cannot produce the number of normal red blood cells. Iron deficiency (iron shortage) is very common in pregnancy and causes anemia. The best dietary source of iron is lean red meat. Chicken, turkey, and fish are also sources of iron, but they contain less than red meat. Dry apricots, molasses, potatoes, raisins, dark leafy greens such as spinach, chard, parsley and strawberries also contain some iron.

Iron Supplements

A blood count will be drawn during your pregnancy at the first visit and again in the third trimester to determine whether you have an iron deficiency anemia. Lack of iron may lead to unusual tiredness, shortness of breath, a decrease in physical performance, and learning problems in children and adults, and may increase your chance of getting an infection. If you are recommended to take an iron supplement, it can be purchased without a prescription. Different preparations include ferrous sulfate, ferrous gluconate or ferrous fumarate. Your body can absorb only a small amount each day, so any of these preparations is adequate for iron supplementation. Some iron preparations contain vitamin C, which increases iron absorption or a stool softener if you have problems with constipation. If you are taking more than one iron tablet per day, separate the times that you take it. Iron should not be taken with antacids. Stools may turn black in color while taking iron supplementation.