

Importance of Iron Supplementation During Pregnancy: Fetal Development and Anaemia Prevention

Johanna Chewe*

Department of Food and Nutrition, University of Montevideo, Montevideo, Uruguay

DESCRIPTION

Iron is a nutrient during pregnancy, essential for the production of hemoglobin, which helps deliver oxygen to both the mother and the developing fetus. Iron deficiency during pregnancy can lead to significant health complications for both the mother and the baby. Iron supplementation is used to prevent and manage iron deficiency and anemia during pregnancy.

During pregnancy, a woman's blood volume increases significantly, necessitating higher iron levels to support the increased production of hemoglobin and to supply oxygen to the fetus. The growing fetus also requires iron for its own development, particularly for the formation of red blood cells and brain development.

Anemia is a common condition in pregnant women, characterized by a lower than normal number of red blood cells or hemoglobin. This can lead to symptoms such as fatigue, weakness, shortness of breath and dizziness. Severe anemia can increase the risk of preterm birth, low birth weight and postpartum complications. Iron supplementation is often recommended for pregnant women to begin around the second trimester, as iron needs increase during this time. However, some healthcare providers may suggest starting earlier if the mother is at higher risk for iron deficiency, such as those with a history of anemia or multiple pregnancies. The typical recommendation for iron supplementation during pregnancy is 27 mg per day, which is higher than the daily requirement for non-pregnant women. There are different forms of iron supplements available, including ferrous sulfate, ferrous gluconate and ferrous fumarate. Ferrous sulfate is the most commonly used due to its high iron content and effectiveness, but other forms may be recommended based on individual tolerance and absorption.

Iron supplements are usually taken once or twice daily. It is best to take them on an empty stomach to improve absorption, but they can also be taken with food if gastrointestinal discomfort occurs. Vitamin C can enhance iron absorption, so consuming iron supplements with a glass of orange juice or a vitamin C-rich food may be beneficial. Regular monitoring of iron levels and

hemoglobin is important to assess the effectiveness of supplementation. Healthcare providers may adjust the dosage based on blood tests and the mother's response to the supplements. It's essential for pregnant women to follow their healthcare provider's recommendations and report any side effects or concerns.

Benefits

Iron supplementation helps prevent iron deficiency anemia by increasing the body's iron stores and improving hemoglobin levels. It ensures that both the mother and the fetus receive adequate oxygen, supporting overall health and reducing the risk of complications.

Adequate iron levels can help reduce fatigue, improve energy levels and enhance the overall well-being of the mother. This helps for maintaining a healthy pregnancy and managing the physical demands of carrying and nurturing a growing baby. Iron plays a vital role in fetal development, particularly in the formation of red blood cells and brain development. Ensuring adequate iron intake supports healthy growth and development, reducing the risk of developmental delays and other health issues in the baby.

Potential risks and side effects

Common side effects of iron supplementation include gastrointestinal discomfort such as constipation, nausea and abdominal pain. These can often be managed by adjusting the type or dosage of the supplement, increasing fluid and fiber intake or taking the supplement with food.

Excessive iron intake can lead to iron overload, which can be harmful. This is particularly important to monitor as high iron levels can cause issues such as oxidative stress and damage to organs. Adhering to the recommended dosage and having regular check-ups can help prevent over-supplementation.

Iron supplements can interact with certain medications and nutrients, potentially affecting their absorption and efficacy. For example, calcium can inhibit iron absorption, so it's advisable to separate the intake of iron and calcium supplements.

Correspondence to: Johanna Chewe, Department of Food and Nutrition, University of Montevideo, Montevideo, Uruguay, Email: john_ch@uedu.com

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Dietary considerations

While iron supplements are important, they should complement a diet rich in iron-containing foods. Foods high in heme iron (found in animal products) and non-heme iron (found in plant-based foods) can enhance iron intake. Heme iron sources are red meat, poultry and fish. Non-heme iron sources are lentils, beans, tofu, spinach and fortified cereals. Combining these foods with vitamin C-rich foods can further improve iron absorption. For example, adding tomatoes or bell peppers to a spinach salad can enhance the bioavailability of non-heme iron.

CONCLUSION

Iron supplementation is a vital component of maintaining maternal health and ensuring the healthy development of the fetus during pregnancy. By following guidelines for dosage, timing and administration, addressing potential side effects and interactions, pregnant women can effectively manage their iron levels and reduce the risk of anemia and associated complications. A balanced diet rich in iron and regular monitoring by healthcare providers will further support a healthy pregnancy and contribute to overall well-being for both the mother and the baby.