Early pregnancy do’s & don’ts

Congratulations on becoming pregnant! Now you are pregnant there are certain things you should consider to keep you and your baby healthy.

Do

Take folic acid:

It is important for you to take folic acid (400mcg a day) before becoming pregnant and for the first 12 weeks of your pregnancy. This reduces the risk of your baby developing neural tube defects such as spina bifida.

Supplement your diet with vitamins:

Taking a Vitamin D supplement may be recommended for some women. In particular if you have a poor intake of vitamin D in your diet (found naturally in oily fish, eggs, meat), if you have limited exposure to natural sunlight, or if you are of a south Asian, African, middle eastern or Caribbean background. In these cases you may consider taking a supplement of 10mcg of vitamin D a day.

It is not necessary to take iron tablets while pregnant unless prescribed by your doctor.

Exercise:

It is recommended to do 30 minutes of moderate intensity exercise a day while you are pregnant. This can help manage your weight and contribute to your overall health during pregnancy. Avoid contact sports such as rugby, or any sport where you are at increased danger of falling. Strenuous exercise (when your body is put under a lot of pressure) should be avoided.

Monitor your weight:

It is important to stay a healthy weight while pregnant. Every woman is different so there is no universal recommendation of how much weight is acceptable to put on during pregnancy. Taking regular exercise and eating a balanced diet can stop you putting on excess weight during pregnancy. This will make it easier to return to your normal weight after pregnancy.

Practice safe food hygiene:

It is important to pay attention to food hygiene during pregnancy to reduce the risk of getting certain infections such as Toxoplasmosis, listeriosis and salmonella. Make sure you:

- Wash your hands before and after handling food
- Cook all food thoroughly
- Avoid all foods containing raw or partially cooked meat and eggs
- Wash all fruit and vegetables before use.
To further reduce your risk of coming into contact with Toxoplasmosis, avoid contact with cat faeces (wear gloves when handling soil in the garden and avoid emptying cat litter trays).

**Don’t**

**Smoke:**

Smoking increases the risk of your baby being underweight. It also increases the risk of pre-term birth.

**Drink alcohol:**

You should avoid alcohol for the first 12 weeks of your pregnancy as it is linked with a higher risk of miscarriage. If you choose to drink alcohol during pregnancy it is advised to drink a maximum of 1 – 2 units once or twice a week (1 unit = half a pint of beer/ lager, or one shot of spirits. One glass of wine (125mls) = 1.5 units). Binge drinking or getting drunk should be avoided while you are pregnant to prevent harm to your baby.

**Caffeine:**

There is conflicting evidence available about the effects of caffeine during pregnancy. Some research suggests that large amounts of caffeine can cause harm to a developing baby. Other research has shown no link between caffeine and poor health of a baby. However you may want to consider cutting down your caffeine intake while pregnant.

**Eat for two:**

Sometimes women are tempted to increase what they eat during pregnancy as they are now ‘eating for two’. However the amount of energy your body needs does not change for your first 6 months of pregnancy and only increases slightly (by 200 calories a day) in the last three months. ‘Eating for two’ can cause you to put on too much weight during pregnancy and make it harder for you to return to your normal weight after having your baby.

**Take drugs:**

Very few prescription or over the counter medications are approved for pregnancy. Therefore avoid taking medications during pregnancy unless prescribed by your doctor. Recreational drugs such as cannabis should also be avoided to prevent harm to your baby.

**Eat certain foods:**

Certain foods can increase your risk of picking up infections during pregnancy. In particular avoid unpasteurised dairy products. Unpasteurised milk, soft cheeses such as Brie, blue veined cheeses and unpasteurised (raw) dairy products can put you and your baby at risk of infection. There is no risk with hard cheeses such as cheddar cheese, and processed cheese.

Liver and liver products (such as patés) contain high levels of vitamin A. High doses of vitamin A are linked with risk of birth defects. Avoid these products during your pregnancy and avoid supplements containing vitamin A.

**References**
