

## Article on Pregnancy and Nutrition

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Pregnancy is a period of great physiological as well as psychological stress for women. During pregnancy, the mother has to meet her own needs and the needs of the growing foetus. There is additional need for the growth of the other related tissues; and to build up fat stores to cushion the foetus, prior to birth, and to supply part of the energy needed for milk formation during lactation. Thus, the need for additional nutrients involved in tissue synthesis is increased during pregnancy for the fast growing foetus.

Since earliest times, the diet of pregnant women has been considered to be of great importance. It was believed that the foods eaten by the pregnant women had an influence on the physical characteristics and behaviour of the unborn child. Consequently, certain rigid rules as to what foods a pregnant woman should and should not eat were laid down by various societies. Even today, several superstitions on this subject prevail among many people in our country.

In the first trimester of pregnancy, the rate of growth of the foetus is very slow and the mother is not able to take much food because of nausea and vomiting, which are very common during this period. It is during the next two trimesters that the foetus grows rapidly and therefore, the nutritional needs are increased. Adolescent mothers, who have not completed their own growth, may be affected, which may indirectly affect the welfare of the foetus. If the mother's diet has been adequate before pregnancy, she may be in a better position to meet the demands of pregnancy.

No mother would like to injure the health of her baby through poor food habits. However, nutritional studies have shown that many women attend to the needs of other family members at the expense of their own needs. This situation does not change during pregnancy. Thus, pregnant women are often most poorly fed members of the family. In her effort to take care of the others, she does not take time to sit down and eat. When she is very tired she is unable to eat. If the food supply is limited (in low income group families), she is the worst affected, as she feeds all other members and eats what is left. It is important that the family should plan the arrival of the baby so that the pregnant mother does not suffer from lack of food both in terms of amount and kind. The expectant father must try to ensure that the expectant mother gets the right amount and kind of foods, so that the health of the foetus does not suffer.