



southern
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Iron Supplementation in Pregnancy

Iron is a nutrient needed in pregnancy in such large amounts that even a well-balanced diet would not provide enough. Without supplements 80% of women will have depleted iron stores by the end of their pregnancies. So, in following the guidelines of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) and the Center for Disease Control (CDC), we recommend that taking 30mgs of elemental iron daily after the first trimester.

Iron is available over-the-counter; it does not need a prescription. When ferrous iron is in a prenatal or multivitamin with calcium, iron absorption is decreased. Because of this decreased absorption, we recommend you take an additional iron supplement, even if you are taking prenatal or multivitamins. You will need to buy one of the following supplements (any brand is fine).

- Ferrous sulfate 150 to 365 mg (30-65mg elemental iron).
- Ferrous fumarate 100 (Chewable) or 150 mg (33 to 50mg elemental iron).
- Ferrous gluconate 300 mg (35mg elemental iron).
- Carbonyl iron 50 mg (of iron)
- Polysaccharide-iron complex 50 mg (of iron), brand name is Niferex, You must ask the pharmacist for this iron as it is kept behind the counter.

Our dietician recommends ferrous gluconate because it is well-tolerated. If ferrous iron causes unpleasant side effects for you, try Polysaccharide-iron complex or carbonyl iron. These should have the least side effects. In addition, research shows that carbonyl iron does not cause toxicity if accidentally taken by children. The absorption of this type of iron requires stomach acids, so the smaller the stomach the less iron that can be absorbed.

We routinely check your hematocrit (HCT) for anemia twice during pregnancy. If you are anemic you will need to take 30-50mg of elemental iron twice per day. You also need 15 mg of zinc and 2 mg of copper per day, which can be found in a prenatal or multivitamin. Plan to be rechecked in 4 weeks.

As the years go by, we learn more and more about the absorption of vitamins and minerals. In the 70's, we were taught to give iron with milk to protect the stomach. In the 80's, we were taught to give it with orange juice to enhance the absorption. Now we understand that ferrous iron is already in its absorbable form, so that taking it on an empty stomach either between meals or at bedtime is best. You need to avoid taking iron within two hours of an antacid, thyroid medications or Metamucil.

You may become constipated because of your iron supplements. If you do, in addition to drinking plenty of fluids and getting regular exercise, you can take Metamucil or Citrucel powder, Metamucil wafers or Fibercon tablets. These are all bulk-forming laxatives and are safe to take regularly. Please see our prenatal book we have given you for more suggestions.