

Module 8, Lesson 4 Handout:
Pre & Post Natal Nutrition

Working with pregnant and nursing moms can be an amazing experience. In general, these clients will be SO motivated to be as healthy as possible so that they can feel great during pregnancy and grow a healthy baby. Eating Empowered is an important part of pregnancy, and there are some specific nutrients that expecting moms need to pay extra attention to. Here's how you can best support your clients during this time.

Prenatal Nutrition Considerations

Let's be blunt: it is the worst idea to treat pregnancy like an excuse to eat anything you want, gain excessive amounts of weight and worry about it after delivery. While there's nothing wrong with a little indulging, the concept of getting pregnant is, as you know, to deliver a healthy and well babe. Food should be used to fuel a growing child. For prenatal moms, focus on these nutrition cornerstones:

Folate

Folate and folic acid (which is the synthetic form of folate found in supplements and fortified foods) are essential to preventing birth defects. Natural sources include spinach, beans, asparagus, oranges and peanuts. Most grains and cereals are fortified and all prenatal vitamins contain it, plus, folate is really easy to absorb in a supplement. The dietary recommendation for pregnant women is 600 mcg, which you'll find in most prenatal supplements.

Calcium

You're developing a whole skeleton in there, so of course you need calcium. Prioritize getting a serving a day of dairy. Though we all have our personal views on dairy, research strongly links drinking cow's milk to skeletal benefits. Results from the Framingham Heart Study found that higher intake of total dairy was associated with higher bone mineral density and lower risk of hip fracture, while a systematic review published in *Current Developments in Nutrition* found consumption of dairy products may benefit bone structure and development in youth. If you find your client or you yourself are not on the dairy bandwagon, you can absolutely recommend and focus only on calcium rich dairy alternatives, like non dairy milk and non dairy sources such as sardines, tofu, dark green leafy vegetables, sesame seeds and dried fruit (raisins, dried apricots or figs). Calcium fortified cereals and juices can also be helpful to get in the 1000 mg per day requirement for pregnant women (note that the recommendation for women under 18 is 1300 mg per day.)

Protein

Quality protein is essential for growing a healthy baby. While it's really hard to be protein deficient in the United States and most people are getting too much protein (pregnant ladies included), having a little protein in meals and snacks is essential. Focus on plant based proteins such as beans, legumes, nuts and nut butter and eggs during pregnancy, as well as lean meats and fish. Keep in mind meat can be an aversion during pregnancy, or it can be a craving, so customize all of your protein recommendations for clients. Most experts recommend 75 to 100 grams of protein per day during pregnancy.

Iron

Iron is essential. It's used to make red blood cells and to prevent iron deficiency anemia. Pregnant women need twice the iron as non pregnant women. The daily recommendation during pregnancy is 27 mg. Iron is in a lot of the same foods already recommended, like whole grains, dried fruit, dark green leafy vegetables, nuts, beans and lean meats, so it isn't a stretch to include iron rich sources in your recommendations. It's also in fortified cereals. Iron is more of a concern in vegetarian eaters as plant based sources aren't as readily absorbed. Recommend pairing iron-rich foods with vitamin C-rich foods to promote better absorption of iron.

Omega-3 fatty Acids

Higher intakes of foods containing omega-3 long-chain polyunsaturated fatty acids during pregnancy have been associated with longer gestations and improved perinatal outcomes. During pregnancy, omega-3s are a critical building block of the fetal brain, eyes, and nervous system. After a baby is born, omega-3s support brain development and immune function. They also support a healthy postpartum mood and maternal well being. Most prenats are EPA and DHA fortified at this point. Also, recommend fatty fish, chia seeds and nuts. The National Academy of Medicine recommends at least 1.4 g of omega-3 fatty acids daily during pregnancy.

Weight Gain During Pregnancy

Weight gain recommendations during pregnancy are customized based on the client. Shoot for a range, not a specific number to gain during each of the trimesters, and try to align with OB goals as much as possible so the client can receive a consistent message from her providers.

If the pregnant client starts at a healthy weight, recommend maintaining that weight for the first trimester and into the beginning of the second trimester. One to two pounds a week thereafter with a goal of 20 - 25-pound weight gain total.

For overweight clients, aim to limit weight gain to 15 pounds.

Severely obese clients may not gain weight and can still deliver healthy babes. Focus on healthy eating behaviors and meeting nutrient needs. If you have a severely overweight or obese client, make sure you are on the same page as the OB in guiding expectations.

Postnatal Nutrition

Continue to customize each plan individually. Most moms are so overwhelmed after the baby arrives that “just do the best you can” for the first few weeks may be the best recommendation. Some will rush right back into wanting their body back and others are in less of a rush. No matter where your client is in wanting to return to an uninhabited body, meet her there.

Encourage breastfeeding if that is an option - it helps mom’s body recover and return to a healthy weight and it helps the baby’s immune system. Research also shows breastfed babies also maintain lower weights as adults than non breastfed babe counterparts.

Moms will still have slightly higher nutrition needs while they are breastfeeding. Most mothers require about 500 extra calories per day during lactation to keep up with the demands of breastfeeding. Focus on continuing to get these calories in through wholesome nutritious foods to help mom’s body recover from pregnancy.

Needs for some specific nutrients will also still be higher after giving birth and while breastfeeding. Calcium stores were depleted during pregnancy, so these needs remain higher. Recommend foods high in B vitamins including whole grains and dark greens to ensure metabolic pathways are properly maintained and promote plenty of fruits and vegetables to provide antioxidants that will aid in repair and recovery from giving birth. Eating foods rich in omega-3 fatty acids is also still important as it will make breast milk higher in this nutrient too and omega-3s are critical for a baby’s brain and eye development. Suggest moms stick to their prenatal vitamins while breastfeeding to ensure these needs are met.

Digestive issues are also common. Watch out for constipation in postnatal moms. Recommend high fiber foods like apricots and whole grains and extra water (water is especially important when breastfeeding as it can drain the body of fluids.) Exercise helps, but it should not be intense.

While mom is adjusting to life with a newborn, she'll likely need some help with ideas for quick and easy meals. A few ideas to help keep mom on track with nutrition while she's spending all her time with her new child include:

- Getting proactive before delivery. Around week 36 of pregnancy, recommend moms make extra single serving batches of quality foods like vegetarian chili or lentil soup and freeze portions to make postnatal meals simpler.
- Recommend a meal plan that is more assemble and eat -- think of a lunch like hummus, carrots and whole grain crackers. The biggest hurdle in eating well after a new baby arrives is that eating with one hand while the other hand is holding a baby can be hard.
- Suggest mom set reminders in her calendar for meals. Interrupted meals, forgetting to eat and eating whatever is around are other common complaints. Reminders can help squeeze in the time.
- Come up with a realistic plan for exercise. Consider long stroller walks or look into local post natal classes.