

Women's Health

What are some health supplements typically taken by pregnant women and what are the benefits?

The most common prescription of health supplements are folate and iron. Not many women are aware that they should preferably start taking their folate vitamins from 3 months prior to their conception date. This reduces the occurrence of neural tube defects, such as spina bifida, significantly. Some women may also want to take calcium supplements while others have also gone on to taking DHA supplements during their third trimester and well into their breastfeeding period.

What should one look out for whilst shopping for health supplements and what cautions should one be aware of?

Always ask your obstetrician before taking any sort of health supplements. Usually, they would have already advised you on the supplements that you may specifically need. Beware of pharmaceutical claims of being able to turn your little one into a 'Baby Einstein' with just a pop of a pill! Read the labelling carefully and always bring it to your obstetrician's attention before consumption.

Is there a specific group of pregnant women who are advised to take health supplements and are they essential for every mother- to-be for a healthy pregnancy?

If a woman is deficient in iron or malnourished in any way, it is advisable to take iron and an array of vitamin supplements. Singaporean women are generally healthy and are very rarely lacking in nutrition. You usually do not need any health supplements, except for iron and folate. More importantly, mothers are advised to partake in a healthy diet with regular non-strenuous exercise. Avoid raw fish, meats that are not well cooked, as well as soft cheeses. These can predispose you to parasites that may affect the baby. Some studies have also shown that caffeine, especially in early pregnancy, may cause an increased predisposition to miscarriages.

What are some natural supplements that can be taken for a healthy pregnancy?

One must remember that unlike prescription drugs, natural/herbal supplements do not undergo the rigorous testing on their safety and efficacy in pregnancy. Hence, try to avoid natural supplements that are of unproven medical value.

Women are known to take herbal teas such as Jasmine and Chamomile to calm them during their antenatal period but the effects of other herbs taken during pregnancy are unknown.

Are there any health risks/ dangers involved?

Herbal supplements are generally not well studied during pregnancy. Rarely, some of them may have unexpected adverse effects, so do not take any supplements that are of unproven safety in pregnancy. Always consult your obstetrician first.