

## Standard 4

### Common Nutrition Concerns

**Help families understand common nutrition concerns associated with pregnancy. Address symptoms with safe tips that support adequate nutrition during pregnancy.**

#### Why is this Standard important?

It is normal for women to experience some uncomfortable symptoms during pregnancy. Depending on the severity, some symptoms can have a negative impact on a woman's food and nutrient intake. These tips may help alleviate some discomfort and help women get the nourishment they need to support a healthy pregnancy and healthy baby.

#### Help women address common nutrition concerns:

##### **Nausea and vomiting**

Many women experience nausea and vomiting during their pregnancy. This is commonly referred to as "morning sickness", although it can occur at any time of day. Women experiencing nausea and vomiting can try the following tips:

- Try to eat 6 small meals/snacks during the day. Small meals may be easier to tolerate than large meals.
- Keep easy to digest foods, such as crackers and pretzels, with you during the day and at your bedside. You may even try eating a few crackers before getting out of bed in the morning.
- Drink water or other beverages (caffeine-free) between meals.
- Eating ginger or drinking ginger ale may improve nausea.
- Lower-fat foods are easier to digest. High-fat foods can make nausea worse.

Women should follow up with their health care provider if their nausea or vomiting is severe or if they have concerns they are not gaining weight appropriately.

##### **Constipation**

Increased hormones during pregnancy can cause the digestive system to slow down and can result in constipation. Constipation occurs if a woman has less than three bowel movements per week with stools that may be hard, dry, and difficult to pass.

Eating high fiber foods and drinking plenty of fluids can help prevent constipation. Women should slowly increase the amount of fiber (up to 25-35 g per day) they eat over a few weeks and remember to drink water. Adding too much fiber without water could make symptoms worse.

High fiber foods to encourage include whole grains cereals and breads, vegetables and fruits with the skin on, beans of all varieties, and brown or wild rice.

## **Heartburn**

Acid reflux (heartburn) occurs when the muscles at the bottom of your esophagus don't open and close properly. This allows food and stomach acid to back up into your esophagus, and can cause a burning sensation in the chest and throat.

### **To help prevent and manage reflux, women can try the following:**

- Eat small, frequent meals
- Avoid foods that make symptoms worse. Common irritants include: caffeine, chocolate, high fat foods (e.g., fried meats, nuts and nut butters), peppermint and spearmint, pepper
- Avoid lying down after eating
- Elevate the head of your bed (this can also be done with pillows)

If women continue to have heartburn, they should talk to their health care provider. They can determine if over the counter or prescription medications might help alleviate symptoms.

## **Alcohol**

Women should avoid drinking any alcohol (e.g., beer, wine, mixed drinks, liquor) while pregnant. There is no established safe level of alcohol use during pregnancy, and even moderate drinking can have harmful effects on a baby.

## **Caffeine**

Most experts agree that consuming less than 200 mg of caffeine per day (about one 12 ounce cup of coffee) is safe during pregnancy. Keep in mind some drinks will have more caffeine than others. Check the labels of sodas, teas, and energy drinks for their respective caffeine content.

## **Vegetarian/Vegan Diet**

Vegetarian eating patterns are recognized as a healthy dietary choice. Vegetarian diets vary widely so it is important to ask women which foods they avoid. Women that follow a vegan eating pattern (no animal products) may need to take a vitamin B12 supplement. Creating a Daily Food Plan on MyPlate can help women identify which foods they need to eat more of for a healthy diet.

## **Taking vitamins**

Along with a healthy diet, prenatal vitamin and mineral supplements help ensure women are getting all the nutrients they need. Some women, especially those already experiencing nausea or vomiting, find that supplements upset their stomach.

To avoid this, women can try taking the supplement with a small meal or snack (not on an empty stomach) or before bed.

## Over the Counter Medications

Some over the counter medications and dietary or herbal supplements can be harmful during pregnancy and should not be taken. Women should not take any medications or supplements that have not been prescribed by their health care provider.

## Pica

Pica involves the consumption of non-food items. During pregnancy, these items are commonly clay, starches (like laundry detergent) or ice. Although it has been thought that certain nutrient deficiencies could cause cravings for nonfood items, the causes of pica are not well understood. Some women may ingest these items as part of a cultural tradition or socially accepted practice, or to relieve pregnancy associated symptoms like an upset stomach.

Women ingesting non-food items may be at risk of not getting enough calories or vitamins and minerals they need. They may also inadvertently ingest a chemical or substance, like lead, that could pose a risk to mom or baby. Some women may feel embarrassed or ashamed to talk about pica. Reassure women that this is not uncommon during pregnancy and encourage them to be open with their health care provider who may offer individualized guidance or follow-up.