Vitamin C

This sheet is about exposure to vitamin C in pregnancy and while breastfeeding. This information is based on available published research studies. It should not take the place of medical care and advice from your healthcare providers.

What is vitamin C?

Vitamin C is also known as ascorbic acid and dehydroascorbic acid. It is an essential vitamin. Essential vitamins are nutrients that the body cannot make, so people need to get vitamin C from other sources. Vitamin C is naturally found in some foods such as fruits and vegetables. Vitamin C is also available as a dietary supplement.

What is the Dietary Reference Intake of vitamin C for women who are pregnant?

The Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA) is the amount people should aim to get each day. It is not recommended to take more than the RDA in a day. The Tolerable Upper Intake Level (UL) is the dose that people can start to have side effects.

	Recommended Daily Allowance (RDA)	Upper Limit (UL)
Pregnant and 14 to 18 years old	80 mg per day	2,000 mg per day
Pregnant and 19 years old or older	85 mg per day	2,000 mg per day

When looking at daily intake, remember to count amounts from foods, drinks, and from supplements. There are resources available online that list amounts of vitamin C typically found in foods. Labels on supplements will list the amount of vitamin C in the product.

Most people can get enough vitamin C from a balanced diet. It is unlikely that you will get too much vitamin C if your only source of vitamin C is in your food and drink.

People who have exposure to cigarette smoke or who have medical conditions that might affect how their body absorbs vitamins (such as cancer, eating disorders, kidney disease, malabsorption, or substance misuse) should talk with their healthcare providers about their specific nutritional needs.

I take vitamin C. Can it make it harder for me to get pregnant?

Vitamin C has not been well studied to see if it can make it harder to get pregnant. However, if a woman is getting recommended amounts of vitamin C (not too much and not too little) it would be unlikely to make it harder to get pregnant. Two studies have suggested that vitamin C intake might help to lower the chance of infertility (inability to get pregnant).

I just found out I am pregnant. Should I stop taking vitamin C?

It is not recommended to take more than the RDA of vitamins unless you are doing so under the care of your healthcare provider. Talk with your healthcare providers about all supplements/vitamins that you take. Have the bottles or photos of the labels with you so that all ingredients and their recommended daily levels can be reviewed. Products that contain herbal supplements are typically not recommended during pregnancy. For more information on herbal products please see our fact sheet at: https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/herbal-products-pregnancy/.

Does taking vitamin C increase the chance of miscarriage?

Miscarriage is common and can occur in any pregnancy for many different reasons. While vitamin C supplements and miscarriage have not been well studied, if a woman is getting the recommended amounts of vitamin C (not too much and not too little) it would be unlikely that vitamin C would increase the chance for miscarriage. Studies where vitamin C was given to women who were pregnant prior to 20 weeks in an effort to reduce miscarriage or other pregnancy complications; no reduction in miscarriage was found.

Does taking vitamin C increase the chance of birth defects?

Birth defects can happen in any pregnancy for different reasons. Out of all babies born each year, about 3 out of 100 (3%) will have a birth defect. We look at research studies to try to understand if an exposure, like too much or too little vitamin C intake, might increase the chance of birth defects in a pregnancy.

Vitamin C intake below the RDA or at doses higher than the UL is not known to increase the chance for birth defects. However, vitamin C has not been well studied in relation to birth defects. It is recommended that people take the RDA of vitamin C unless their healthcare provider prescribes something different.

Does taking vitamin C in pregnancy increase the chance of other pregnancy-related problems?

Several studies looked at the use of vitamin C supplementation in the second and third trimester of pregnancy to try to lower the chance of pregnancy-related complications such as preterm delivery (birth before week 37), low birth weight (weighing less than 5 pounds 8 ounces [2500 grams] at birth), and preeclampsia (high blood pressure and problems with organs, such as the kidneys), which can lead to seizures (called eclampsia). These studies did not consistently find benefit or harm to the baby from this supplementation. There is a report of 2 babies exposed to levels higher than the RDA (more than 400mg per day during pregnancy). After delivery, these 2 babies had rapid metabolism of vitamin C and then showed signs of vitamin C deficiency.

Does taking vitamin C in pregnancy affect future behavior or learning for the child?

Studies have not been done to see if vitamin C intake below the RDA or at doses higher than the UL can increase the chance of behavior or learning issues for the child.

Breastfeeding while taking vitamin C:

Vitamin C is a normal part of breastmilk. Women who are breastfeeding should continue to get the daily recommended amount of vitamin C. The RDA for breastfeeding is different from pregnancy.

	Recommended Daily Allowance (RDA)	Upper Limit (UL)
Breastfeeding and 14 to 18 years old	115 mg per day	2,000 mg per day

Breastfeeding and 19 years old or older	120 mg per day	2,000 mg per day

People who have exposure to cigarette smoke or who have medical conditions that might affect how their body absorbs vitamins (such as cancer, eating disorders, kidney disease, malabsorption, or substance misuse) should talk with their healthcare providers about their specific nutritional needs. Be sure to talk to your healthcare provider about all of your breastfeeding questions.

If a man takes vitamin C, could it affect fertility or increase the chance of birth defects?

A few studies have found that vitamin C might help to improve fertility (ability to get a woman pregnant) for some men but not for others. Men who are experiencing infertility should discuss treatment options with their healthcare providers. In general, exposures that men have are unlikely to increase the risks to a pregnancy. For more information, please see the MotherToBaby fact sheet Paternal Exposures at https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/paternal-exposures-pregnancy/.

Please click here for references.

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