

Healthy pregnancy starts well before conception. Adequate intake of nutrients will preserve the health of the mother and ensure enough minerals for foetal growth and development. The nutrition of the mother three to six months before conception greatly determines the health of the embryo, according to published studies. For example, unlimited alcohol consumption has been associated with birth defects such as congenital neural tube. Folic acid is necessary to prevent this condition.

Those on weight reduction diets should not contemplate pregnancy as some of their diets may deny the foetus vital nutrients. It is, therefore, advisable to seek nutritional help during and before pregnancy, especially if you are reducing weight.

Salt intake needs to be restricted to avoid toxæmia larare and increase in blood pressure that results from a rise in sodium in the body.

Calcium, also an important mineral, should be consumed in adequate amounts to ensure both bone and future teeth development of the infant. Young mothers under 25 years can also benefit from added calcium as their bones and teeth are yet to be fully formed.

Yoghurt, milk, whole grain bread and green leafy vegetables are essential components of a pregnant woman's diet. Vitamin D, found in fish oils such as cod liver oil, is essential for enhanced calcium absorption. Zinc, which assists

Yoghurt, milk, whole grain bread and green leafy vegetables are essential components of young mother to be's diet

Food for healthy pregnancy

GOOD LIVING

BY SOLOMON KARANJA

the development of the foetus's immune system, is vital and readily found in lean meat, whole grain cereals and nuts.

Iron is useful in foetal and maternal blood formation and is absorbed in the intestines when Vitamin C levels are adequate in the body. The use of citrus fruits during meals should be increased to

improve iron uptake to avoid incidences of anaemia. Oranges, lemon and passion fruits are good as well.

Excess Vitamin A, especially from animal meats like liver and supplements, causes birth defects. But Vitamin A from carrots, apricots, red pepper, pumpkins and spinach can be safely taken in excess quantities.

Development of the brain and eyes in the foetus can be improved if the mother consumes fish, as it contains the essential

omega-3 fatty acids.

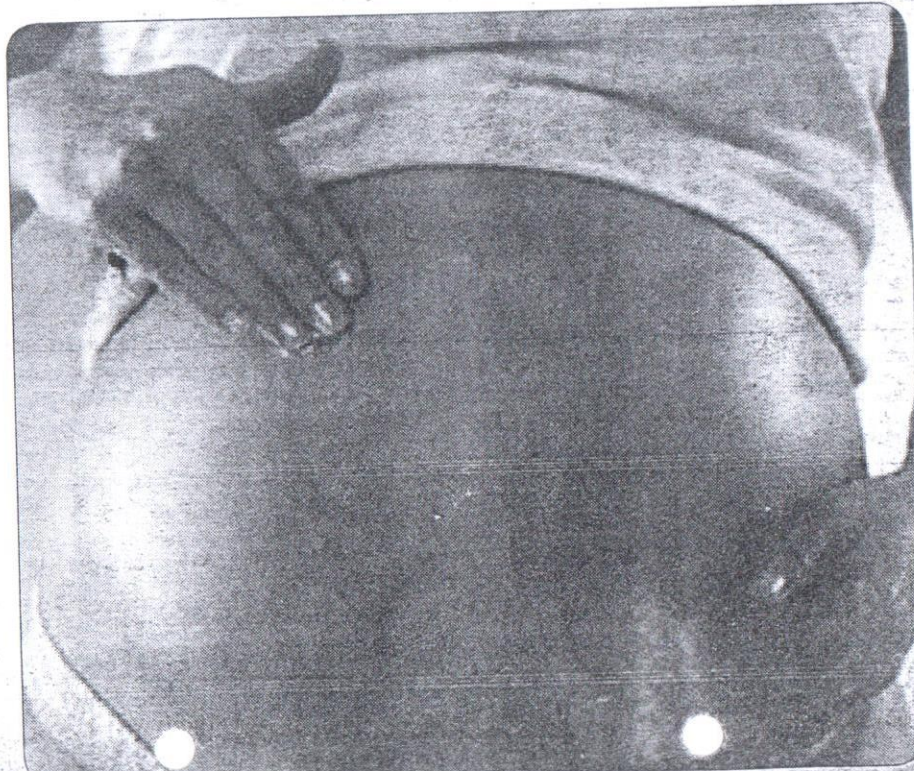
The first 12-16 weeks of pregnancy are fraught with morning sickness and mothers are advised to eat often, albeit in little quantities during this phase. Yoghurt and milk reduce indigestion and heartburn.

Due to body hormonal changes, constipation may occur due to relaxation of the intestines. This is an unwelcome condition in pregnancy. Drink plenty of water and eat high fibre diets and dried fruits, especially prunes, which have excellent natural laxatives.

An unborn child can be infected by the consumption of contaminated food, causing miscarriage or stillbirth. A listeria scare in 1989 resulted in public advice to pregnant women not to take cheese (and camembert) in Britain. Maternal hygiene especially in the preparation of foods must be ensured at all times. Eggs should be cooked well and hands washed in hot water after handling fresh meat to avoid infection with the parasite that causes Toxoplasmosis. This parasite is also spread by cats.

Taking herbal concoctions during pregnancy should be avoided, as they could contain ingredients that can harm both the mother and child or even cause spontaneous uterine contractions that may lead to miscarriage or unintended abortion.

Attending pre-natal clinics is absolutely necessary.



Dr Karanja is a pharmacist based in Naivasha
skaranjag@yahoo.com