

Twin Pregnancy Nutritional and General Support

Here are some general guidelines for caring for yourself during a twin pregnancy. As with any recommendations, check with your care provider about making these changes. These guidelines are to be used along with a general review of pregnancy and nutrition.

One of the goals of being pregnant with twins is keeping your babies in your belly until they are full term. There of course is no way we can guarantee that will happen, but here are some suggestions for optimizing health for you and for your babies.

Nutrition:

Each baby that you are carrying requires that your body expands its blood volume by 50%. Keeping up this blood volume is an important part of babies staying well nourished inside your belly. Undernourishment is a reason babies might decide to come early. As blood is made of salt, water, minerals, and protein (albumin), supporting your body by having more of these is important. For a single baby, a mother typically consumes 2500 calories daily. For each additional baby, 500 calories can be added.

Snacks and meals can be eaten around the clock when you are awake. Even when you wake up to go to the bathroom in the middle of the night, this is also a time that you can eat a small snack next to your bed. Protein intake is one important factor to support your blood volume. With twins, 120-140 grams of protein is recommended daily during pregnancy especially after 22 weeks (time blood volume begins to build to nourish placenta). Whole foods are recommended and preferred, but food based protein supplements can be added to smoothies. However, you can also add yogurt or nut butter to them as well. Be sure to keep salt in your diet (sea salts preferred) to support blood volume expansion as well.

If you are busy during your pregnancy, finding ways to keep yourself fed when on the go or at work can be difficult. Create stashes of food in various places that are always available so that you can follow through on feeding yourself. These stashes can include nuts and dried fruits, hummus and chips, apples and nut butters, cottage cheese, cheese sticks, boiled eggs and yogurt.

Food that was grown and not packaged or frozen has more nutrients for growing babies and a healthy mother. Be sure to have plenty of fruit and vegetables (including dark leafy greens) of various colors.

Water is also an important component of blood volume, and being hydrated does have an affect on amniotic fluid volume. Drinking 4 quarts of clear fluids daily can help keep you hydrated especially if it is hot outside. These clear fluids can include coconut water, herbal teas, electrolyte drinks (no sugar), and water.

Vitamins and Minerals:

The demands of vitamins and minerals on your body are higher with twins. Getting a whole food based vitamin that is easily absorbable is important. Iron levels may also be difficult to maintain with two babies. Discuss your iron levels with your provider. Taking a whole food based iron supplement rather than a synthetic one can help to prevent constipation. Avoid taking it at the same time as a calcium supplement. Also remember iron rich foods like liver, molasses, nutritional yeast, dulse seaweed, kelp, clams, oysters, pumpkin seeds, tofu, amaranth, kidneys, and sesame seeds are also a good way to get some extra iron! Getting a mineral supplement can also help with the increased demands on the body. Taking additional magnesium and calcium daily can help with muscles and connective tissues and can even tame some early contractions along with decreasing your activity level and resting (or even having a glass of wine with a warm bath). Also, a liquid calcium/magnesium supplement nightly before bed can help alleviate leg cramps.

Have your care provider check your Vitamin D levels. Studies are showing that many women are deficient in vitamin D. Many recommend that pregnant women take up to 5000IU daily to support their Vitamin D levels. Vitamin D helps the body to absorb minerals and can also help support your immune system. The babies gain stores from you during the pregnancy.

Some providers suggest homeopathic cell salts in pregnancy to balance the different salts in your body when there are extra demands. This is to assist the tissues in absorbing salts. You may also want to research supplementing with Vitamin C with bioflavonoids in pregnancy as far as strengthening the amniotic sacs.

Optimal Baby Positioning:

As soon as you find out you're pregnant is the time to start stretches and exercises related to pregnancy. It is not just about what position we want a baby or babies to obtain (although visualizing them both to be head down may be a start), but it is also about how we balance the uterus including its ligaments to allow the baby(ies) to move into the best position. Wearing a support belt can also help during the day to support your back, your ligaments, and your belly. When your uterus is balanced, you may be more comfortable, your blood supply is optimized, and the babies have more room for them to position themselves head down (if that is what they decide to do). Regular body work by a chiropractor, massage therapist, acupuncturist, and/or craniosacral therapist can help in various ways as well. I would recommend seeing the chiropractor throughout pregnancy so that your bones are aligned in supporting a balanced uterus.

Exercise:

During the first part of your pregnancy, stay in shape and get your heart rate up daily. As your belly grows, listen to your body. If contractions start while you are active, that is a sign to slow down or stop doing what you are doing. Some mothers

found that being on “bed rest” was the best way to prevent going into labor. Other mothers found brisk walks helpful until they were too uncomfortable. Swimming is a way to relieve the weight of carrying 2 babies and still increase your heart rate. Also, yoga and qi-gong may be just as helpful and your body may tolerate this better than vigorous movement.

Reducing Stress:

Find ways that you can reduce stress in your life NOW, not just towards the end of pregnancy. This may mean reducing hours at work or asking for help for childcare. You can even plan strategies in your family of how you can plan ahead for meals and snacks and how others can support you in this endeavor. In the beginning and middle of pregnancy, this also may mean getting exercise. However, finding brief rests or “mini- meditations” throughout the day can also re-balance the nervous system. Finding times of being in the moment and connecting to the babies can help with balancing stress as well. Being mindful with internal reflection of being in the moment is a great way to rewire a stressed neurological system, and it is a great way to prepare for parenting.

Sleep is important for rejuvenating your body and nervous system. Getting to bed early is a good strategy. Also, using pillows to support your belly and your body can be quite helpful for your comfort.

Other Resources:

Websites-

blueribbonbaby.org (search for twins)

spinningbabies.com (look under Start / In Pregnancy / Twin pregnancy)

Books for twin pregnancy and health-

Luke, Barbara and Tamara Eberlein. When You’re expecting twins, triplets or Quads. Harper Collins Books, 1999.

Noble, Elizabeth. Having Twins and More: A parent’s Guide to Multiple Pregnancy, Birth and Early Childhood. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2003.

<http://sunnybrook.ca/media/item.asp?i=904#.Ugrtilt7ogY.facebook> (2013 study about vaginal birth for twins vs. cesarean)

References:

Frye, Anne. Holistic Midwifery, Volume 1. Portland: Labrys Press, 1998. 894-895.