

Pregnancy Nutrition

Teenage Pregnancy Nutrition



Merrion Fetal Health



If you are the parent or caregiver of a teenager who has become pregnant, you will need to really support her in understanding and taking on board healthy teenage pregnancy nutrition. While the news of her pregnancy may have come as a shock to begin, your acceptance and support is vital.

Teenage pregnancies can carry higher risks

Babies born to teenagers have a higher chance of having some congenital anomalies, lower birth weights and sadly, there's an increased chance of infant mortality. With proper nutrition that takes into account the teenager's lifestyle and GA – gynecologic age, these risks can be reduced.

Understanding GA - gynecologic age



In the case of a teenage pregnancy, current nutritional habits, which are connected to the context of the teenager's peer group and family diet context, need to be taken into account. Additionally the gynaecologic age of the girl is very important.

Her gynaecologic age (GA) is calculated by subtracting the age of menarche (when menstruation first started) from her chronological age. In general, it is considered that growth is completed around four years after menarche. Therefore if a girl has a GA of two years, then her nutritional needs will be different to a girl who has a GA of five years. The girls of two years GA will still be in a growth period, which means she herself will have increased nutritional requirements.

So let's say your daughter started menstruating aged 12, if she becomes pregnant at 15, she still has one year of growth left approximately. Some medical research has illustrated that a pregnant adolescent who is still in a growth period can be [competing with her own fetus for nutrition](#).

So if you are the parent or caregiver of an adolescent who has become pregnant, you will need to calculate her GA and work with her medical team to ensure that her calorie intake and nutrition are dealt with accordingly.

Being realistic about a teenager's eating habits

It's best to be realistic about the current eating habits of the teenager in question. Even if you feel that the eating habits at home are quite good, teenagers often snack on foods that are high in sugar or fat. Snacking with peers can often mean snacks that have low nutritional values. Teenagers can often eat fast food and convenient foods. On top of that, some teenage girls may skip meals.

In order to understand pregnancy nutrition, be sure to read our feature: [11 pregnancy diet and nutrition essentials](#). This article includes a handy food pyramid chart from the HSE (Health & Safety Executive).

Once you have read this article, you will be ready to consider what you need to do to formulate a good teenage pregnancy nutrition plan. **However making a plan is only one part of the supporting her, depending on the teenager's current diet and lifestyle, helping her embrace it may be challenging.**



Teenage pregnancy nutrition-how to help her embrace a balanced eating plan

The sooner that the teenage pregnancy has been positively accepted in the family and peer environment, the better. Like any of us, your teenager will respond better to being surrounded by positive and supportive people. This will be of some help for her to start to consider the nutritional implications of being pregnancy.

1. It's best to find ways to work within her current eating habits.

If possible try to find ways to integrate the nutrition that she needs into her current eating habits. Assess these habits honestly and design a plan that fits into her current lifestyle as flexibly and simply as possible.

2. She is an individual – approach the plan accordingly

Apart from trying to fit her nutrition around her current habits, be aware of her individuality. Are there ways that you can make it easier for her to accept and embrace her new way of life?

3. Foods vs nutrients

For many adolescents nutrients may be a bit challenging to take on board, so it may be easier for you to explain and present her teenage pregnancy nutrition in terms of the foods involved. But there may be some girls who will appreciate understanding more about the nutrients as well. This is a question of individuality as well.

4. Reward her efforts

Make it as positive an experience as possible, by rewarding her good food efforts. Whatever works well as a reward system for her, is what you should adopt.

5. Make it easy

Make it easy for her to get the nutrition she and her developing fetus need. Ensure she is eating food that she enjoys so that she sees any changes as easy and as enjoyable as possible.

6. Help her understand about the positive outcome of gaining weight at the recommended pace in pregnancy

Of course dealing with a teenage girl, self-image and weight may be an issue that needs to be addressed. You will need to find ways that suit her, as individual, to see the positive impact of weight gain at the correct pace in pregnancy. It's super important that she understands and takes on board the need for weight gain for her optimal birth outcome.

7. Consider a nutritionist

It may be helpful, both for you and her, to attend a nutritionist. This can be an educational experience for you as well, and actually benefit the entire family over time. From her perspective, listening to and learning from, a professional may help her understand and embrace pregnancy nutrition for her teenage pregnancy.

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