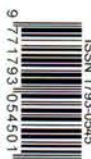


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and like driving."*

— Micky Lin

The captain of Singapore's netball team might have been a race car driver if she weren't a netballer.

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ask

Doctor!

*Will taking prenatal vitamins do more harm than good? Senior Consultant Obstetrician and Gynaecologist of SL Goh Women's Clinic at Mount Alvernia Hospital, **Dr Goh Shen Li**, gives the lowdown on prenatal supplements and offers practical advice on maximising their effectiveness.*



LiveWell: What are the crucial nutrients that expecting mothers need, which have to be supplemented by a prenatal supplement?

Dr Goh SL: Eating a healthy and well balanced diet is important in pregnancy in order to get most of the vitamins and minerals that pregnant mothers need. It is also a good idea during pregnancy to take a prenatal vitamin to help cover any nutritional gaps in the mother's diet.

Prenatal supplements do not contain excessive amounts of vitamins that will harm the mother, even if she is taking them long term. They contain many vitamins and minerals, of which folic acid, iron, calcium, iodine, Vitamins B and D are especially important in the development of a healthy baby.

Exactly how much of each vitamin and mineral is needed?

A prenatal vitamin should include at least 400mcg of folic acid, 17mg of iron, 200-300mg of calcium, 150 mcg of iodine, 400 IU of vitamin D and a combination of Vitamins B (thiamine, riboflavin, niacin, B12).

Vitamin A supplementation is not recommended as excessive amounts can be detrimental to the growing foetus.

Are there any nutrients not included in a prenatal supplement that must be taken from food and/ or other dietary supplements?

Some prenatal vitamins do not contain omega-3 fatty acids, which might help promote a baby's brain development. Expecting mothers, who do not eat fish or other foods rich in

these fatty acids, may consider taking these supplements in addition to prenatal vitamins.

Similarly, mothers who do not consume any dairy products should have calcium supplements, especially in the third trimester, as the baby's bones are rapidly growing and strengthening. Having enough Vitamin C and fibre in the diet can help to improve immunity and constipation respectively.

What if the prenatal supplement causes you to feel nauseous or you can't stomach anything because of bad morning sickness?

Pregnancy itself can cause nausea and bloatedness, especially in the first trimester, and some prenatal vitamins can worsen these symptoms. Try a chewable vitamin or liquid vitamin instead.

Alternatively, if in the first trimester, take only a folic acid supplement. When the nausea improves in the second trimester, you can then start the rest of the supplements.

How do you ensure the prenatal supplement doesn't interact with other medications and food?

If your prenatal vitamin contains iron, try to allow a gap of at least 2 hours before consuming any dairy products as the calcium in dairy products may interfere with the absorption of the iron. Vitamin C supplements encourage absorption of iron or calcium supplements when taken at the same time with either of them. **LW**