

New study reveals thousands of prenatal supplements fail to provide adequate nutrition for pregnant women and babies

April 4 2023



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A new study from researchers in the Lifecourse Epidemiology of Adiposity (LEAD) Center at the University of Colorado Anschutz

Medical Campus shows that 90 percent of pregnant women do not receive adequate nutrients during pregnancy from food alone and must look to supplements to fill that deficit. However, they also discovered that 99 percent of the affordable dietary supplements on the market do not contain appropriate doses of key micronutrients that are urgently needed to make up for the nutritional imbalance.

The study was published today in [The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition](#).

"Nutrition is critical for a healthy mom and a healthy baby. Too little of certain nutrients can cause pre-term birth, low birthweight, [birth defects](#) and other health challenges. At the same time, too much could change how a baby's body develops and their risk of having [health problems](#) in the future", said Katherine Sauder, Ph.D., Deputy Director of the LEAD Center and Associate Professor of Pediatrics in the University of Colorado School of Medicine and lead author of the study. "That's why eating a [balanced diet](#) and choosing a good prenatal vitamin is so important."

The study followed 2,450 women throughout their pregnancy. Researchers first analyzed data about what the participants ate and drank during their pregnancies. They then determined what amounts of vitamin A, vitamin D, [folic acid](#), calcium iron and omega-3 [fatty acids](#) each participant was getting from the food alone and determined how much they needed in order to meet the nutritional guidelines recommended by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) during pregnancy. Then, compared more than 20,000 vitamins that are available in the U.S. that contained additional nutrients.

"Out of all the prenatal and general vitamins analyzed, we found only one that may potentially give pregnant patients the optimal amounts of the most important nutrients. But, the monthly cost of this supplement

can be too high for some people, and it requires pregnant people to take seven pills a day," Sauder said.

Sauder says she hopes doctors, patients and companies use this information to help improve nutritional care during pregnancy.

"This research will inform pregnant patients and their doctors about key nutrients they may be missing in their diet and help them choose prenatal vitamins that can provide the nutrients they need," Sauder said. "Dietary supplement manufacturers can also use these results to inform better dosing in their products."

Sauder says the results of the study highlight an ongoing need for prenatal vitamin options that are low cost and convenient, while still containing the optimal amounts of key nutrients. She says more research on nutrients in foods is also needed to help pregnant patients get more of these key nutrients in their daily diets.

More information: Katherine A. Sauder et al, Selecting a dietary supplement with appropriate dosing for 6 key nutrients in pregnancy, *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* (2023). [DOI: 10.1016/j.ajcnut.2022.12.018](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajcnut.2022.12.018)

Provided by CU Anschutz Medical Campus

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