

FAQs on Choosing the Right Prenatal Vitamin

- 1. Why should I take one?** Prenatal vitamins typically contain more folic acid and iron than do standard adult multivitamins. Folic acid helps prevent neural tube defects. These defects are serious abnormalities of the brain and spinal cord. Iron supports the baby's growth and development. Iron also helps prevent anemia, a condition in which blood lacks adequate healthy red blood cells.
- 2. Do I need to take more than one type of vitamin?** Yes. Standard prenatal vitamins do not include omega-3 fatty acids, which help promote a baby's brain and eye development. Most health care providers recommend taking an omega-3 fatty acid supplement in addition to prenatal vitamins. Calcium and vitamin D are important as well, especially during the third trimester when your baby's bones are rapidly growing and strengthening. Calcium should be taken separately from the prenatal vitamin because calcium lowers iron absorption. Take the calcium and prenatal supplement at least two hours apart. Women experiencing a lot of stomach upset may find taking a probiotic supplement helpful.
- 3. What else is important?** Make sure the vitamin dissolves. Some prenatal vitamins don't dissolve in your stomach quickly enough, which means your body loses out on nutrients. Look for the United States Pharmacopeia (USP) seal of approval on your vitamin, which means it meets dissolution standards.
- 4. What if it is hard pill to swallow?** If you're having trouble swallowing your pill, see if you can find one with a slicker coating. Pills without calcium tend to be smaller (calcium takes up a lot of space), so you may want to try one of these, but be sure you get enough of this essential mineral in other ways. A chewable prenatal vitamin is also an option. If you find that your vitamin makes you constipated or gives you gas, it could be the iron. Talk to your doctor about alternatives.
- 5. When should I take it?** You should take it at the time that you will remember to take it each day, for example, with a meal, before you go to bed or when you wake up. It's not so much what time, but rather making sure you are consistent and take it daily. However, some prenatal vitamins can make already nauseous pregnant women more nauseous. If taking it makes you more nauseous take it with food or before you go to bed.