

Standard 1

Healthy Eating

Promote healthy eating habits. Encourage women to utilize community resources that support nutrition education and healthy foods.

Why is this Standard important?

Healthy eating habits and good nutrition are key components of a healthy pregnancy. The pregnant woman's body provides the environment for the growth and development of her baby, and so it is important that she and her baby get the nutrients they need. Nutritional deficiencies are associated with certain birth defects, preterm birth, and low birth weight. Incorporating and choosing high quality, nutritious foods helps support positive health outcomes for women and their babies.

Help women adopt healthy eating habits that meet nutrient needs:

Nutrient Needs

Healthy eating is a broad term to describe desirable eating patterns that help people meet their nutritional needs through the foods they eat. These healthy foods provide the nutrients our bodies need to stay healthy. Pregnancy is a unique time period when a woman's nutrient needs change to support the growth and development of a healthy baby.

Our primary nutrient needs can be broken down into the following categories: energy (calories), macronutrients (carbohydrates, protein, and fat), micronutrients (vitamins and minerals), and fluid (water) needs.

Calories

Have you ever heard the expression that women are “eating for two” during pregnancy? It's true that women's calorie needs increase to support a healthy pregnancy, but most women can meet these additional needs just by choosing one or two extra servings of nutritious foods that are already part of their diet.

The phrase “eating for two” doesn't really mean that a woman needs twice the calories she normally does. Instead, remind women that the foods they are eating are also supplying all the nutrition for their growing baby.

Iron

Your body uses iron to help make red blood cells and carry oxygen throughout your body. Iron needs increase greatly during pregnancy due to an increase in the blood volume in a woman's body. Iron in foods like red meat is most readily absorbed by the body. Other good sources of iron are beans, leafy greens, and iron fortified cereals and grains. Eating vitamin C rich foods with sources of iron will help increase absorption.

Folic Acid

Folic acid is a B-vitamin that plays an important role in reducing the risk of certain birth defects. Non-pregnant adult women need about 400mcg /day. These needs increase up to 800 mcg/day during pregnancy. Good sources of folic acid include leafy greens, beans, whole grains, or fortified breakfast cereals and grains.

Many women have a hard time getting enough folic acid through food sources alone. Taking a regular multi-vitamin or prenatal vitamin during pregnancy can help non-pregnant and pregnant women meet these needs.

Fluid Needs

Women should be encouraged to drink to thirst, focusing on water. Eight to ten glasses per day is a common recommendation, but women may need to drink more in hot climates. Sugary drinks like soda, flavored teas, fruit drinks, or sports drinks should be limited. These drinks have little nutritional value and contribute extra sugar and calories to a woman's diet.

MyPlate

Women can choose healthy foods from each food group featured on MyPlate to ensure she and her baby are getting the nutrition they need. In addition to vitamins and minerals, good sources of whole grains, protein, fruits, vegetables, and low-fat dairy products provide the calories necessary for healthy growth. For detailed guidance, women can create a Daily Food Plan from ChooseMyPlate.gov that outlines the types and servings of foods to eat each day based on her individual needs.

Go to ChooseMyPlate.gov to:

- Help women create a Daily Food Plan just for them
- Find healthy choices in each food group
- Find more resources and healthy eating tips for pregnant and breastfeeding women, preschoolers, and families

Community Resources

WIC provides breastfeeding support, nutrition education, and healthy foods to eligible women, infants, and children in Arizona. Go to azwic.gov to learn more about WIC eligibility and resources.