



**For immediate release
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SPOTLIGHT ON INADEQUATE DIETS OF NZ PREGNANT WOMEN

Soon-to-be mums are missing out on key nutrients by not following current recommendations about what to eat during pregnancy, amplifying conditions such as iron deficiency anaemia.

A Kiwi study, made up of around 7000 children and their parents, found a staggering 97% of pregnant women do not eat according to the food and nutrition guidelines set by the Ministry of Health.

The study, titled Growing Up In New Zealand, found only one in five women met the specific recommendation to eat at least two serves of protein foods, such as lean meat, fish and eggs, each day.

Women require 2-3 times more iron than normal during pregnancy and to meet this significant increase, and prevent deficiency, it is necessary to eat a variety of iron-rich foods each day.

Consequences of iron deficiency and anaemia in pregnancy include postnatal depression, fatigue, difficulties with bonding and breastfeeding, and increased risk of infection. Women may also struggle to cope with normal blood loss at delivery.

Study author and head of Nutrition and Dietetics at the University of Auckland, Dr Clare Wall, says iron is important for both the mother's health during pregnancy, and for the developing foetus. Ensuring adequate iron in pregnancy can also assist with successful breastfeeding.

"It is recommended pregnant women consume two serves of protein rich foods per day. This can include lean meat which provides a valuable source of easily absorbed iron," says Dr Wall.

Iron deficiency remains an ongoing problem in New Zealand with one in 14 New Zealand women low in iron and many not getting enough iron in their diet each day. It also persists as the most widespread nutritional disorder in the world.

The Ministry of Health's Food and Nutrition Guidelines for Healthy Pregnant and Breastfeeding Women recommend daily servings of four main food groups, which include fruit and vegetables, breads and cereals, milk and milk products, and lean meat, meat alternatives and eggs.

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The lean meat, meat alternatives and eggs group provides essential nutrients needed in greater amounts during pregnancy, including iron.

Iron is vitally important for early brain development and to provide for the mothers increased blood volume which makes iron rich foods, such as lean red meat, a key role at this time.

It is widely acknowledged the haem iron found in animal foods is absorbed at a much higher rate than non-haem iron found in plant foods, all the more reason to eat a varied diet which includes both types of iron.

Those concerned with their dietary intake should seek advice from a registered dietitian or registered nutritionist.

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Background information

The Growing Up In New Zealand study, titled Dietary Patterns in Pregnancy in New Zealand—Influence of Maternal Socio-Demographic, Health and Lifestyle Factors, can be found at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4882712/>

World Iron Awareness Week will run May 1-7 with an aim to raise awareness on the importance of dietary iron in pregnancy, recognising the signs of low iron and what can be done about it.

ironweek.co.nz
#WorldIronWeek

A range of free resources are available at ironweek.co.nz, including *Iron in Pregnancy. Are you getting enough?*

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- There are two types of iron in food: haem iron (found in meat and fish) and non-haem iron (found mainly in plants). The body absorbs haem iron in meat more efficiently than non-haem iron in plant foods, at a rate of 25% compared to around 5%.
- Animal foods, like lean beef and lamb, contain a "meat factor" known to increase absorption of non-haem iron 2-4 fold.
- Vitamin C increases non-haem iron absorption so it is recommended to include vitamin C rich fruit and vegetables with main meals.
- A hearty chilli con carne made with lean beef and kidney beans can provide around a third of the daily iron requirements for pregnant women.

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