

PRESS RELEASE – 24th February 2005

Useful research in times of baby boom:

Copper is of vital importance for babies

Now with the census completed, it has been shown that more than 100,000 children were born in Sweden last year. This is the highest number recorded for a period of 10 years. In Stockholm, more children were born than in the last 50 years, namely 11,000. Therefore, more and more women are affected by new findings concerning their diet during pregnancy and breast-feeding. Many of them know that they may need iron and calcium supplements, yet few know that at the same time, they need to assure their intake of copper.



During pregnancy and breast-feeding, women have to double their intake of copper, from 1.4 to 2.8 mg per day. Today, we know that copper plays a vital role in the development of the foetus, from the assimilation of iron to the building up of the skeleton and a strong immune defence, says Birgitta Jacks, Apoteket AB, a licensed pharmacist and nutritionist. Copper is necessary for the normal functioning of the child's brain, the nervous system and the development of motor activity. The element contributes to the production of connective tissue that affects the elasticity of skin, bones, and not least the heart and blood vessels. Pregnant women are often advised to increase their intake of iron. However, the consequence could be that the foetus' absorption of copper is reduced. If you take zinc and calcium supplements, copper levels can decrease as the result of a reduced assimilation of copper. Therefore, if you take iron, zinc or calcium supplements, it is important to make certain that your intake of copper is sufficient.

Enjoy dark chocolate, nuts and grapes

Copper is present in different kinds of food and during pregnancy and breast-feeding, the intake of copper should be doubled. This can also mean double pleasure. High levels of copper are found in foods like game meat, dark chocolate, nuts, seeds and grapes. Wholemeal products, leguminous plants and seafood are also rich in copper.

Why the baby needs copper

During the last three months of the pregnancy, the foetus' copper reserve is built up. At this time, the child undergoes the greatest amount of development and acquires the reserves necessary to handle the first period after birth. As a baby, the child will get copper through breast milk, which is the best source of copper, as well as in infant formulas which are fortified with copper. Special formulas for premature babies contain extra copper, as such children have not had the possibility to build up their critical reserves.

At birth, a healthy child has a concentration of copper up to ten times higher than that found in the body of adults. Copper is absorbed through the stomach and the small intestine, goes out in the blood, binds to proteins and is further transported to the liver. From the liver, the element is disseminated throughout the body to those places where it is needed.

Minerals working together

For pregnant and breast-feeding women that have been recommended iron or calcium supplements, it is especially important to make sure that the intake of copper is sufficient for the child's well-being, concludes Birgitta Jacks.

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