

## **Staying Cool & Hydrated**

By Becky Gerson, CD(DONA), HBCE

Now that we are moving into the warmer months it is becoming tougher and tougher to drink enough water and stay cool. There are so many reasons to make staying hydrated a priority while you're pregnant. Here are just a few of these reasons:

- Avoid those pesky pregnancy headaches.
- Avoid uncomfortable constipation that can lead to hemorrhoids.
- Keep swelling to a minimum.
- Support the crucial expansion of your blood volume in order for your kidneys and liver to keep functioning optimally and to keep your blood pressure stable.
- Prepare your body for the blood loss that accompanies birth and recovery.

Not only that, but if you get really dehydrated you could have a whole lot of unnecessary contractions. You could feel like you might be in preterm labor, or if you are already at the end of your pregnancy and your body is ready to go into labor anyway, dehydration can make contractions feel unbearable. You could even find out you're barely dilated and you need IV fluids to calm things down.

Here are a few tips for getting the water you need and actually retaining it in a healthy way:

1) Get yourself a nice water bottle that has a built-in straw. This will make it easier for you to take some big gulps every so often without the extra step of unscrewing the top and then screwing it back on.

2) Make sure your water has the essential minerals in it that you need in order for your body to retain it properly. You can add minerals that you pick up at your local health food store, buy a type of bottled water that has added electrolytes, or just refrain from filtering all of your water – as long as you live in a place where you feel comfortable not filtering, of course.

If you are filtering all of your water, you could potentially drink and drink and drink and still go to your prenatal appointment and find out that your body is dehydrated. The minerals are essential for proper hydration - it's not just about the water itself!

3) Do whatever you can to physically cool your body down. If you are in a hot and humid environment, you may feel like you are drinking plenty of water and getting all the right minerals, but you still may not be staying properly hydrated. You may need to spend more time in a cooler environment where you will sweat less, in addition to drinking more water. This could include time at a nearby air-conditioned mall or in a swimming pool.

I remember being in Los Angeles during a heat wave while I was pregnant and calling my husband up in tears because I was just so miserable and emotional. I didn't even realize that I was dehydrated or as hot as I really was until he told me "Becky, go fill the bathtub with cool water, take your water bottle in there with you, and soak for a little bit. Then call me back and we'll talk." I remember being annoyed with him for acting like this would

solve all my problems, but I did it anyway and guess what – it worked! Within about 5 minutes I pulled my weepy self together and gave a friend of mine a call and invited her to go walk around the air-conditioned mall and grab some tea while we were at it (boba tea to be exact)! Once I was cool and hydrated it turned into a lovely evening.

Once you are drinking enough water, getting all your minerals, and staying cool, you are going to feel so much more comfortable, both physically and emotionally. And if you haven't experienced pregnancy dehydration yet, I hope these tips will help you avoid ever having to feel that way.

Bottoms up! Or as we say in my family, l'chaim, to life!

## **Quick Fix for Mood Swings and Meltdowns**

By Becky Gerson, CD(DONA), HBCE

I'll be honest with you... being a woman and having hormones that ebb and flow through cycles, I am no stranger to the occasional mood swings that come with hormonal shifts. But while I was pregnant and postpartum, the overwhelming emotions and sometimes loss of emotional control were quite a bit more frequent. The thing is, my husband caught on even faster than I did that there was a way to prevent the mood swings and meltdowns.

Whenever I'd start to cry or otherwise lose control, he'd go "Did you forget to take your B vitamins?" In the moment, this question would piss me off, but I'd take it to heart and be more committed to taking my vitamins every day because I knew they really did help me "keep it together."

Ok, I know this sounds way too simple to be true, but it really is true and it really is that simple!

Take a B Complex vitamin. Take it every day, at least while you are pregnant or postpartum. It could change your life - and your relationship with your partner. Seriously.

B Vitamins (particularly B6 and B12) can help with morning sickness. B Vitamins can boost your energy. And B Vitamins can make you feel good.

I even met a midwife once who told me that she requires all her apprentices to take a B Complex vitamin regularly, just so everyone will get along better.

Sometimes I even think that my teenage years could have been completely different had I just learned 10 or 15 years earlier that B vitamins would mellow me out and make me feel more in control.

What a concept.

So if you've been feeling emotional, on edge, weepy, or anything along those lines, consider taking some B vitamins, and then let me know how you feel after a few days of taking them consistently. I have a hunch that you won't regret giving this one a go!

A few side notes: choosing vitamins from whole food sources – in liquid or pill form – is often best; and if you know you have MTHFR genetic polymorphisms, you'll want to do your own research and choose B vitamins that are already methylated, such as methyl folate and methyl B12.

(Disclaimer: As always, I encourage you to do your own research and discuss this with your care provider for more information or to get the "go ahead." I am not a doctor or midwife, I am just an expert holistic pregnancy mentor, doula, and mama.)

## **How to Curb the Sugar Cravings and Understand What Might Really be Going On in Your Gut in the First Place**

By Becky Gerson, CD(DONA), HBCE

If you read my blog post *What's Up With The Pregnancy Cravings?*

[<http://www.nurturedmommy.com/1/post/2012/06/whats-up-with-the-pregnancy-cravings.html>] you already know that when you're pregnant, most cravings happen for a reason and it is a good idea to figure out what they mean so that you can better care for and support your body.

Do you find yourself craving sweets way more often than you would like to be? Your body might be dealing with an overgrowth of yeast, which is actually pretty common during pregnancy. And yeast basically feeds on sugar, so your challenge is going to be curbing the sweet cravings and balancing out the yeast in your body.

A certain amount of yeast is normal - it is in your gut and you don't even know it is there unless you have an overgrowth that manifests itself in what you may know and hate as a vaginal "yeast infection." An overgrowth can also show up as "thrush" when you are breastfeeding, causing pain in your breasts and then potentially spreading to your baby's mouth if you aren't careful!

Along with yeast, there are other types of good and bad bacteria in your gut that you will always want to keep in check. Group Beta Strep is another one you may have heard of if you are further along in your pregnancy or if you have had a baby before and have had a GBS test/culture done. If you test GBS positive, then the GBS that hangs out in your gut and doesn't cause a problem there has spread to your genitals where it can unfortunately pose a risk to your baby during birth and potentially lead to a very serious respiratory infection.

If you're pregnant, you can see why this is definitely the time to balance out your digestive system so that you won't have a bigger problem on your hands later - whether that means having to retroactively treat an already established GBS infection or a yeast overgrowth, or both.

I want to share with you a few easy ways to curb the cravings and balance out the yeast and the good and bad bacteria in your gut. You may even be able to prevent testing positive for GBS if you follow these simple tips.

1) Whenever you are craving sweets, have a half a grapefruit instead. Some midwives say a grapefruit a day keeps the GBS away. But regardless, it will give you something a little sweet for a snack that will satisfy your craving without contributing too much (if at all) to feeding the yeast, or to excessive weight gain if you have had a serious problem resisting the sweet cravings up until now.

2) Snack on some yogurt or kefir that doesn't have a lot of added sugar and that is high in probiotics (it will say it has probiotics on the package - or homemade is even better, if you're crafty like that!)

3) Take a daily probiotic supplement. Probiotics add good bacteria to your gut and help balance things out. You can pick these up at a local health food store. The refrigerated ones might seem a little pricey, but they are supposed to be the best because they are live and live longer in a cool environment. You'll have to decide if you want to invest in them for a few months, or go with a less expensive type that doesn't have to be kept cool.

4) Ask your care provider about checking your Vitamin D levels and supplementing to support your overall immune system. Chances are you'll get the results back and he or she will tell you to start supplementing right away with 5000 IU's a day, or more. Many, many people are deficient in Vitamin D - even the ones who spend a lot of time out in the sun. Spending time in the sun just doesn't seem to cut it anymore because of factors like wearing sunscreen, or washing the natural oils off of your skin with soap when you bathe more often than our ancestors did.

Last time I shared these suggestions, the response I got was a text message from my client telling me that my advice was "genius" and it totally worked within just a few days! I was so happy that I was able to help her get her body in balance, stop eating so many sweets everyday, and start feeling better, too!

(Disclaimer: As always, I encourage you to do your own research and discuss this with your care provider for more information or to get the "go ahead." I am not a doctor or midwife, I am just an expert holistic pregnancy mentor, doula, and mama.)

## **Going Green to Eating Greens: Consciously Preparing for Baby**

By Becky Gerson, CD(DONA), HBCE

Growing another human being can be an incredibly fulfilling, yet physically and mentally challenging experience. Once you have a baby on the way you are often inundated with information – everything from advice on not gaining too much weight, to registry recommendations, to pressure about where or how to birth your baby. It can be hard to sort it all out and decide what you feel is the best for your body and your baby. Many health conscious and naturally minded couples spend hours upon hours researching their options. When it comes to preparing for baby, purchasing baby products, and nourishing your pregnant body, a good rule of thumb is: if you think it is toxic to the environment it's probably toxic to your body and your baby too.

During pregnancy it is especially important to make conscious choices about what you put onto your skin. It only takes 26 seconds for chemicals to seep through your skin and enter your bloodstream. Then the toxins can easily cross your placenta and potentially interfere with your baby's development. Think about how even having too much caffeine on a regular basis can interfere with proper growth. If you are putting products laden with chemicals on your body day in and day out, the accumulation of potentially harmful substances in your tiny baby's bloodstream may seem like something any conscious mama would want to minimize.

You may have heard of the Environmental Working Group's "Dirty Dozen" and "Clean 15" lists that act as a guide to purchasing organic produce, but did you know about the EWG's Skin Deep Cosmetic Database? You can just type in a given brand or product to get an idea of how hazardous it is to your body. The website even has a designated drop down menu just for "Babies & Moms." And the SkinDeep App for your smartphone can make shopping for safer products easier when you are on the run.

There are many chemicals that we come in contact with in other forms, like household cleaners, and even laundry detergent. If you are using products like disinfecting wipes and harsh household cleaners, as you prepare for baby you will want to consider making the switch to reusable microfiber rags and more mild but efficient cleaners. Many parents even make their own simple cleaning solution with vinegar, water, and their favorite essential oils. Just keep in mind that some oils are not recommended for pregnancy. Some also have more antibacterial properties than others. These are good reasons to do a little research before experimenting with homemade cleaning solutions.

There's always the option of making your own laundry detergent too, but if this isn't already one of your sustainable habits, it may or may not be the ideal time to start making your own. With a baby in the house you'll definitely be doing a lot of laundry, so weigh your options. The number of safe detergents, for both baby and the environment, are steadily growing, so you shouldn't find it too difficult to grab a relatively safe alternative while you're shopping.

Before switching detergents, consider whether you are planning on using cloth diapers and wipes. Luckily there are many detergents that are both environmentally friendly and work for cloth diapers. You may want to run an extra rinse cycle when you wash your diapers, regardless of the type of detergent you choose.

I never realized how easy cloth diapering (and caring for the diapers!) could be until we tried it. My husband now tells every new dad he meets that they should switch to cloth! If you do take the plunge and go for the cloth, cloth wipes actually make diaper changes easier - especially when you are out and about. It's easy to use the wipes and just leave the dirty ones inside the diaper to throw in the wash together when you're back home. If you use cloth diapers but disposable wipes, it complicates the process because you'll always be looking for somewhere to dispose of the wipes after you put the diaper in your wet bag.

A "wet bag" is a reusable, lined, bag that was made just for holding wet baby clothes and dirty diapers. Investing in a few medium sized wet bags is a must! Don't go for a large bag because then you'll have to stick your entire arm in to grab diapers that are at the bottom. If you have a High Efficiency washing machine it is probably a front loader, so you won't be able to just dump the diapers directly in from a large bag.

With an HE washing machine, keep in mind that you'll need to experiment with your wash settings to figure out how your particular machine will get the diapers totally clean. And remember, the sun is your friend. You can hang your diapers to dry in the sun, not only saving energy by not running your dryer, but also keeping your diapers in great condition and avoiding stains so you can use them for your next baby or even sell them when you are done having babies.

Cloth diapering is not only better for the environment (for the obvious reasons of keeping diapers out of our landfills and also cutting down on the carbon footprint that the manufacturing process leaves behind), but better for baby because you avoid the toxic chemicals that are what give most disposable diapers their absorbency. An added bonus: you'll probably spend around \$300.00 on your diapers and never have to think about putting another dime towards diapers again!

As far as larger baby products go: if it is big, bulky, and plastic, chances are you don't really need it. Here are the real essentials:

- A wrap for babywearing.
- A soft structured baby carrier that has a wide support under baby's bottom to keep him or her in a healthy semi-sitting position rather than hanging.
- A co-sleeper to go right next to your bed for baby's first months.
- Clothes. Consider whether the pajamas you purchase for your baby contain flame retardants. This is a controversial issue, especially since eczema and chemical allergies have recently become so prevalent.
- A carseat. Consider a convertible carseat, which is a larger seat that can be used from 5 to 65lbs. Extended rear facing is the current safety recommendation, so aim for a carseat that can stay rear facing for as long as possible.

Be careful of baby products that contain BPA and PVC. Be especially conscious of bath toys that will be soaking in water with your baby. Your baby's toys will be chewed on often! Wood, silicone, and stainless steel are safe and sustainable options, for toys and dining accessories.

In the midst of all your preparations and research on green living and green parenting, you will also want to make sure you are nourishing your body. Eating plenty of greens, especially once any morning sickness or food aversions have subsided, can help you keep your iron levels up. This, in turn, will help your body better handle birth and postpartum. If you are interested in learning more about how your diet affects your baby and your birth, check out the second section in "3 Key Strategies to Get the Birth You Want," which you can find at one of the links on the resource list below.

By becoming conscious parents you are taking a step toward raising a healthy and conscious next generation. Going green is a process, so begin with a few things that resonate with you and that you can get excited about. Thankfully, once you value our beautiful green earth, and start consciously considering the effects of different chemicals on your body and your baby, chances are you'll love the lifestyle and there'll be no turning back!

Some of my favorite resources for conscious parents:

<http://www.ewg.org/skindeep/> "Smarter Choices, Healthier Living"

<http://thesoftlanding.com/> "Safe, Natural Mom & Baby Experts"

<http://www.safbaby.com/> "Safe Alternatives for Baby and Child"

<http://www.nurturedmommy.com/3-key-strategies-to-get-the-birth-you-want> or

<http://www.readytogivebirth.com/> "3 Key Strategies to Get the Birth You Want"

<http://www.holisticmoms.org/> "Living Healthy, Living Green"