VITAMINS AND MINERALS
IN PREGNANCY AND LACTATION
Preface

Clearly, mother and child face special nutritional problems during pregnancy and lactation; but optimization of nutrition during these periods still poses a number of questions, some of which this volume attempts to answer.

Although it is no surprise that the supply of vitamins and trace elements in the mother, the maternal milk, the fetus, and the baby all exhibit considerable individual differences, some recent research findings are of particular interest: They confirm the mother’s need for special dietary supplements of vitamins, minerals, and trace elements during pregnancy and lactation, a phenomenon that often shows wide individual and regional variations. Signs of deficiency can be determined biochemically before they are manifested clinically. The same is true in overdosage and intoxication. For example, the fetus and the suckling infant show higher serum levels for water-soluble vitamins than the mother, while the values for fat-soluble vitamins are lower. Even in “normal” pregnancies, deficiencies in folic acid, iron (or ferritin), calcium, phosphorus, and vitamin $B_6$ are observed. The rate of fetal abnormality (neural tube defects, miscarriage) is higher in mothers with folic acid deficiency. The rate of morbidity and mortality is higher in infants deficient in vitamin A. In premature infants born before week 32 of gestation, hypovitaminosis E leads to a higher incidence of cerebral hemorrhage. Infants fed exclusively on breast milk, who did not receive vitamin K prophylactically at birth, are at risk of cerebral hemorrhage between the fourth and sixth weeks of life.

Among the subjects included in this volume are the significance of iodine deficiency and intoxication for cerebral metabolism and of zinc deficiency for immune development. New topics, such as the part played by the placenta in the metabolism of vitamins, minerals, and trace elements; the influence of fetal metabolism and amniotic fluid; and the levels of substances in the amniotic fluid and their significance for the fetus are also covered in this book. Other topics include the problem of rickets in breast-fed infants and that of hypoferric anemia and the considerable differences in maternal milk after premature deliveries and at term deliveries.

The results presented in this book will prove fruitful ground for future research in this field. This volume will be of use to obstetricians, neonatologists, and those involved in public health research.

Heribert Berger
Foreword

Health improvement of the pregnant and lactating mother and her child through optimal nutrition has always been the aim of the Nestlé Company. The series of Nestlé Nutrition Workshops (to date, 14 published volumes) attests to this continuous interest, starting with Volume 1, dealing with calories and protein requirements of the pregnant mother, continuing with Volume 8, which examines trace elements in pregnancy and lactation, in two chapters. In Volume 13, one chapter is devoted to essential fatty acids and brain development, and the whole of Volume 15 centers on the biology of human milk.

The latest delivery, Volume 16, based on a joint symposium between Nestlé and Hoffmann-La Roche, contributes additional knowledge on vitamins and minerals in pregnancy and lactation, but the subject is still not completely exhausted. For example, maternal deficiency in certain elements such as B vitamins or iodine can almost certainly induce fetal defects, whereas other nutritional deficiencies do not have the same effect because the fetus behaves like a perfect parasite pumping whatever is necessary for its normal growth from the mother. The same is true for lactation, during which vitamin E or iron intake by the mother seems to have no influence on breast milk composition, whereas, in contrast, zinc intake or vitamin B₆ intake is reflected in the milk composition.

The existence of such a difference is one of the puzzling questions that scientists will have to discuss in a future Nestlé Nutrition Workshop.

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There is no doubt that the nutritional status of the mother at the beginning of pregnancy and the nutrition of the mother during pregnancy and lactation have a strong impact on the outcome of pregnancy and on the health of mother and child. With regard to micronutrients, interestingly enough, only little scientific work has been done to prove this statement. The aim of the Hoffmann-La Roche–Nestlé symposium has been to bring together distinguished scientists working in this field to obtain a comprehensive picture of the state of the art and to stimulate new research.

The present volume contains the text of the main lectures and statements
made during discussion. It is hoped that the volume will be of use to those who are confronted with the daily problems in obstetrics and neonatology as well as to those who are involved in public health research on the improvement of health for mother and child.

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Acknowledgments

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## Contents

**Basic Concepts**

Maternal Nutrition and Pregnancy Outcome .......................... 1  
*R. Buzina*

Physiology of Pregnancy and Lactation ............................. 3  
*V. Václavinková*

β-Carotene Transfer into Colostrum in Cows: Evidence of Temporary Increase in Low-Density Lipoprotein Receptors in Mammary Gland During Formation of Colostrum .................................................. 13  
*F. J. Schweigert*

Vitamin and Mineral Requirements of Pregnant and Lactating Women ................................................................. 15  
*W. Kübler*

Vitamin and Mineral Status of Pregnant Women and Newborns in Some Groups of the Spanish Population .................................................. 25  
*G. Varela, O. Moreiras-Varela, M.-P. Navarro, and R. M. Ortega*

Preventative Effects of Vitamins and Minerals on Early Abortion ................................................................. 27  
*S. Koller*

Vitamin and Mineral Requirements in Infancy: How Can They Be Determined? .................................................. 29  
*B. A. Wharton*

Vitamin E Nutriture of Newborns and Infants in Brazil  ...... 43  
*I. D. Desai, F. E. Martinez, and J. E. Dutra de Oliveira*

Vitamin Status in Early Infancy ........................................ 45  
*J. S. Vobecky and J. Vobecky*
Trace Element Supply in Young, Healthy Infants as Related to Trace Element Content of Diet .......... 49
H. B. von Stockhausen, U. Rössick, V. E. Negretti de Brätter, and P. Brätter

Assessment of Vitamin Status in Pregnant Women .......... 51
G. B. Brubacher

Vitamin E Status in Pregnancy and Newborn Infants with Respect to Red Blood Cell Tocopherol .......... 59
M. Mino

Significance of Cord Blood Values for the Newborn .......... 61
H. Berger

Thiamine Status in Primigravidas and in Cord Blood .......... 71
T. Vichai and L. Nusiri

Assessment of Mineral Status .................................. 73
H. Dirren

Maternal Morbidity in Relation to Vitamin and Mineral Status During Pregnancy

Vitamin and Mineral Status in Healthy Pregnant Women .... 93
H. van den Berg

Vitamin Status in Women During Pregnancy ................. 109
J. S. Vobecky and J. Vobecky

A Nutritional Study Involving Groups of Pregnant Women in Umbria, Italy: Preliminary Results .......... 113
A. Alberti-Fidanza

Iron Balance in Pregnancy .................................... 115
L. Hallberg

Folate .......................................................... 129
I. Chanarin

Calcium and Vitamin D Status During Pregnancy .......... 135
F. H. Glorieux, E. E. Delvin, and B. L. Salle

Osteocalcin in Maternal, Neonatal, and Cord Blood .......... 145
C. Panero, M. Cecchettin, G. Mainardi, V. Sorice, A. Granelli, and B. Tarquini
CONTENTS

Serum Calcium and Magnesium Status in Women with Leg Cramps During Pregnancy ........................................... 147
  M. Hammar and G. Berg

Vitamin D Status of Breast-Fed Infants and Their Mothers ................................................................. 149
  J. K. Visakorpi and M. Ala-Houhala

Fetal Development and the Nutritional Status of the Newborn in Relation to Maternal Vitamin and Mineral Nutriture

Evaluation of Antenatal and Perinatal Vitamin C Status in Pregnancies Threatened with Prematurity ................. 151
  S. C. Sharma

Maternal Nutrition in Small-for-Date Babies ................................................. 165
  C. J. Richards

Importance of Adequate Folate Nutrition in Embryonic and Early Fetal Development ........................................ 167
  C. J. Schorah

Neural Tube Defects and Vitamin Prophylaxis ........................................... 177
  P. Lenehan, D. MacDonald, and P. Kirke

Serum Folate Levels in Pregnancies Associated with Neural Tube Defects ..................................................... 179
  P. N. Kirke, A. M. Molloy, I. Hillary, D. G. Weir, and J. M. Scott

Vitamin E Supplementation and Periventricular Hemorrhage in Very Preterm Babies ........................................ 181
  M. L. Chiswick, S. Sinha, J. Davies, and N. Toner

Oral Vitamin E Supplementation in Small Premature Babies ................................................................. 201
  P. W. Nars

Early Trial on the Prevention of Intracranial Hemorrhage in Premature Infants by Tocopherol (Vitamin E) .............. 203
  A. Minkowski

Physiopathology of Iodine Nutrition During Pregnancy, Lactation, and Early Postnatal Life .............................. 205
  F. Delange, P. Bourdoux, J. P. Chanoine, and A. M. Ermans
Fetal and Neonatal Development in Relation to Maternal Trace Element Nutrition: Manganese, Zinc, and Copper ................................. 215
L. S. Hurley and C. L. Keen

Vitamins and Minerals During the Postnatal Period and Lactation

Vitamins and Minerals in Pregnancy and Lactation: An Introduction ........................................ 231
A. Ballabriga

Vitamin C, Folate, and Biotin Nutrition During Prolonged Lactation ........................................ 247
L. Salmenperä, A. Siimes, and J. Perheentupa

Vitamin Status and Supplementation of Rural Gambian Women ............................................. 261
C. J. Bates

Serum Zinc, Copper, and Selenium Concentrations in Healthy Mothers During Pregnancy, Puerperium, and Lactation: A Longitudinal Study .............................. 265
P. Anttila, S. Salmela, J. Lehto, and O. Simell

Effect of Fetal Sex and Maternal Smoking on Cord Blood Glutathione Peroxidase Activities .................. 273
H. L. Halliday, M. Bannon, and D. McMaster

Vitamin Concentration in Term Milk of European Mothers ......................................................... 275
L. Dostálová, L. Salmenperä, V. Václavinková, P. Heinz-Erian, and W. Schüep

Dietary Intake of Vitamin B₆ Glycoside by Lactating Women and Its Effect on Milk Vitamin B₆ and Infant Vitamin B₆ Status ......................................................... 299
R. D. Reynolds, J. E. Leklem, S. Acharya, and P. B. Moser

Vitamin and Mineral Composition of Preterm Human Milk: Implications for the Nutritional Management of the Preterm Infant ................................................. 301
A. Kirksey and A. Rahmanifar

Copper and Zinc Requirements for Extremely Low Birthweight Infants .................................. 331
H. L. Halliday and D. McMaster
CONTENTS

Vitamin C-Dependent Hypertyrosinemia in Small Premature Babies: Diagnosis Through Routine Metabolic Screening in Urine ........................................ 333
P. W. Nars and H. Wick

Zinc Balance in Premature Infants: Providing the Minimal Dietary Zinc Requirement .................. 335
I. Matsuda, A. Higashi, T. Ikeda, and K. Iribe

Vitamin C Supplementation Increases Low Plasma Vitamin C Levels of Premature Infants Fed Human Milk .......................................................... 337
K. Heinonen, I. Mononen, and T. Mononen

A Collaborative Study on Vitamins, Minerals, and Trace Elements in Breast Milk .............................. 339
E. M. DeMaeyer

131I, 134Cs, and 137Cs in Austrian Milk .................................. 351
F. Haschke, B. Pietschnig, and V. Karg

Aluminum in Infant Formulas and in Breast Milk .......... 353
M. Heil, I. Steffan, F. Haschke, and H. Vanura

Maternal Nutrition: Breast Milk Yield and Composition (A Longitudinal Study in Turkey) ................ 355
O. Köksal

Nutritional Problems in Breast-Fed and Artificially Fed Infants

Rickets in Breast-Fed and Artificially Fed Infants .......... 359
J. M. Pettifor

Phosphorus Depletion in Very Low Birthweight Infants on Long-Term Total Parenteral Nutrition ............ 381
G. Briassoulis, S. Photopoulos, M. Davakis, and M. Xanthou

Rickets in Breast-Fed Very Low Birthweight Infants ......... 383
M. Lindroth

Vitamin K and the Breast-Fed Infant ............................... 385
S. J. Fomon

Vitamin K1 Content of Human Milk in Various Maternal Nutritional States .................................. 389
K. Sawada and Y. Hanawa
Quantitation of Trans-Vitamin K₁ in Small Serum Samples: A Study Emphasizing Vitamin K₁ Status at Delivery and After Birth, Related to Feeding Conditions ......................................................... 391

P. M. M. van Haard and A. L. J. M. Pietersma-de Bruyn

Plasma Concentrations of Vitamin K₁ and PIVKA-II in Bottle-Fed and Breast-Fed Infants With and Without Vitamin K Prophylaxis at Birth .................................................. 393

J. Widdershoven, L. Monnens, W. Lambert, A. de Leenheer, K. Motohara, and I. Matsuda

Acarboxy Prothrombin in Dried Blood Spots as a Marker for Vitamin K Deficiency in Young Infants ..... 395

K. Motohara and I. Matsuda

Vitamin K₁ Status, Its Clinical Implication, and Oral Prophylaxis in Breast-Fed Thai Infants ......................... 397

A. Tejavej

Vitamin K₁ in Fetus and Human Milk ............................................ 399

L. Sann, M. Guillaumond, B. Fournier, M. Leclercq, and M. Bourgeay-Causse

Iron in Infant Nutrition ............................................................... 401

M. A. Siimes

Does Iron Supplementation Reduce Zinc Bioavailability in Preterm Infants? ............................................. 411

H. L. Halliday and D. McMaster

Impact of Vitamin A Deficiency on Infant and Childhood Mortality ......................................................... 413

A. Sommer, I. Tarwotjo, and K. P. West, Jr.

Xerophthalmia and Severe Protein Energy Malnutrition ..... 421

S. Pudjiadi

Safety of Vitamin and Mineral Supplements for Mother and Child .......................................................... 423

R. E. Olson

Safety of Vitamin and Mineral Supplements for Mother and Child, 24 September 1986, in Innsbruck ............. 433

D. Hornig

Final Comments ........................................................................... 435

J. Rey

Subject Index .............................................................................. 439
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