

## **Good nutrition for short and long term benefits**

Pregnant women should learn how to have a healthy eating plan that will promote optimal nutrition during pregnancy. This includes understanding the foods that should be eaten to provide essential nutrients (quality); and the amounts of foods needed.

Many women don't realise that nutrition during pregnancy has short and long-term effects on their health and that of their baby. Dietary quality from the first weeks of pregnancy influences the development of the baby and the placenta; this in turn has an impact on the growth of the baby and on maternal wellbeing.

Poor quality eating puts mother and baby at risk for complications during delivery, excessive bleeding, weaker immune systems and poor post-natal recovery.

In the long term an imbalance of energy and nutrients can affect the health and development of the child for the rest of its life.

"Maternal and infant undernutrition increases the child's risk of developing chronic diseases as an adult. The period from conception to 24 months of age is a crucial window of opportunity to achieve optimum nutrition. Failure to do so will have irreversible long-term consequences," warns Berna Harmse, ADSA president.

"The lifestyle changes experienced when women are about to become mothers often result in many women making positive food choice adaptations," explains Harmse. "But these changes should focus on the foods they should be eating and not only on the foods they should be limiting or avoiding. In this way these changes would help set the precedent for lifelong healthy family eating patterns."

Healthy eating plans before, during and after pregnancy are important for the health of the woman and for the development of her unborn child. Such plans should include the right amount of the foods to provide nutrients, including starchy foods, vegetables, fruit, legumes, lean chicken and meat, fish and low fat milk products.

Women who are pregnant or planning to fall pregnant should consult a registered dietitian for advice and eating plans tailored to their needs.