You are what you eat... you are what your mother ate...

This phrase is becoming more accurate as new research emerges to show that the developing baby in utero is adapting day by day according to the nutrition it receives and the environment it experiences. It is thought that the baby’s brain and body is making adaptive changes to its organs and metabolic system in response to what it anticipates the ‘outside world’ will hold in store once born. Lucky for our growing babies they will have first call on nutrients in pregnancy, but if mum is deficient, baby will struggle to optimize their development.

Lack of calories in pregnancy is one problem for growing babies – another is too many calories in the form of nutrient poor foods. This tells us that not only enough food is key, but food choices which include nutrient dense foods. These include foods like eggs, fresh meat, seasonal vegetables and fruit and a range of dairy. Examples of nutrient poor foods would be fizzy drinks, sweets, white bread and packet noodles.

Did you know that the last trimester of pregnancy marks a growth spurt in the baby’s brain? The importance of fats in the diet, especially omega 3 types, is crucial in maturing the brain structure and optimizing visual acuity. Since colostrum and mature breast milk is relatively high in fats and cholesterol these nutrients are high on the list for healthy brain development in human brains.

Once baby is born, as mums we are still nourishing our babies – and the first milk, colostrum is perfect for supplying everything baby needs in the first 3 or 4 days. After that breast milk or a suitable formula is a complete food for the first five to six months of baby’s life.

What can parents do?

When planning for pregnancy both ‘mum and dad’ aim to eat from a variety of food groups and supplement (like folic acid) if necessary – remember the health of baby depends on both sperm and egg!

- Healthy food habits as a lifestyle will have a positive influence on the child’s future choices (before, during and after pregnancy)
- Rather than think Mum has to eat for two to satisfy her growing baby – make smart food choices maximizing the nutrient quality over number of calories
- When pregnant it is even more important to eat quality fats – this is not a good time to go on a low fat diet! Eat foods like fish, coconut /oil, avocados, chia seeds, unsalted nuts, olive oil, flax oil and supplementary oils like blackcurrant, borage, evening primrose and krill or fish oils
- Spending time outside will elevate your mental mood and your sense of wellbeing and it gives the opportunity for sunlight to convert vitamin D in your body, vital for many processes in your body and babies system also. Vitamin D is linked to many positive mental effects.