



# Be *more* with **Good Nutrition**

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## Seafood—great for child development

Nature and Nurture (genes and the environment) are the major factors which have an impact on child development. Good nutrition, therefore, plays a very important role in child development. Research studies in Jamaica and abroad have long demonstrated the positive effect of breakfast on performance in school-aged children. At an even earlier age, the maternal diet has been shown to have an effect on cognitive development long before birth. Cognitive development includes human perception, thinking, and learning. Nutrition during the early part of a child's life is linked to performance in later years.

Some nutrient deficiencies of the mother could have a devastating effect on her unborn baby during a sensitive period of brain growth. This would have a long lasting effect on later cognitive functioning of the child. Some of the nutrients involved are:-

- **Iodine** Maternal iodine deficiency can result in cretinism (dwarfism and mental retardation), impaired cognitive function, and poor school performance in their offspring.
- **Iron** An inadequate iron intake has been studied extensively and can adversely affect cognition
- **Zinc** There is some evidence that suggests that an inadequate intake of zinc can lead to delays in cognitive development. Zinc is a trace element present in the brain.



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- **Omega-3 fatty acids** Docosahexanoic acid (DHA) in particular, is an omega-3 fatty acid of critical importance to brain and eye development through all the life stages. It is especially important during the first two years of life.

Between birth and 5 years there is a rapid increase in brain mass. During this time of rapid growth it is important that children consume enough DHA to support this rapid growth. It is important for brain and eye development, and supports normal cognitive function.

Seafood is an excellent source of protein, iron, zinc, iodine, and DHA, all crucial nutrients for baby's growth and development. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Dietary Guidelines (2015) encourages Americans to eat more seafood. The latest update (released in January 2015) recommends at least 8 oz (on average two fish meals per week) of a variety of seafood for persons eating a 2000-calorie-per-day diet. The aim is to take in at least 250 mg per day of the omega-3 fatty acids.

The recommendation is the same for women who are pregnant or breastfeeding. This is to promote optimal foetal and neonatal cognitive development of their infants. The emphasis, however, should be on seafood with low levels of mercury. Some seafood, particularly large, predatory fish e.g. king mackerel, barracuda, and shark can accumulate high levels of mercury which can damage a baby's developing brain. Safe seafood choices which have low levels of mercury are salmon, shrimp, sardines, herring, anchovies, tilapia, catfish, cod, atlantic and pacific mackerel, and canned light tuna. Albacore tuna is safe, but does contain a slightly higher level of mercury.

The message is clear - eat more seafood.

