

## 'Poor iodine intake by pregnant women harming IQ of babies'

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Pregnant women are not eating enough iodine-rich foods such as milk and cheese, hampering adequate brain development of their babies, a new study has warned.

Iodine is required for the production of thyroid hormones, which are crucial for foetal development, with links between iodine deficiency and developmental impairments.

While 96 per cent of pregnant women surveyed were aware of general nutritional recommendations for them, only 12 per cent were aware of iodine-specific advice.

Unborn children and young infants are entirely reliant on their mother for iodine supply, making babies and pregnant or lactating mothers the most vulnerable group of the population.

The study, published in British Journal of Nutrition, estimated the median intake of iodine during pregnancy was 190 micrograms per day, with 74 per cent consuming less than the World Health Organisation (WHO) recommended intake of 250 micrograms daily.

"Women aren't receiving the message about the importance of iodine in pregnancy, meaning they cannot make informed choices to ensure they get the amount they require," said Dr Emilie Combet, who led the research at the University of Glasgow.

Iodine deficiency affects 1.9 billion people globally and is the most preventable cause of intellectual disability.

The UK is ranked 8th in a list of iodine-deficient countries in the world.

The main sources of iodine-rich foods are seafood and dairy products, and in some countries iodine-fortified salt or bread.

The study surveyed 1,026 women across the UK who were pregnant or mothers of children aged up to 36 months.

Participants were asked about their awareness of nutritional guidelines and completed a food frequency questionnaire.

Knowledge of iodine-rich foods was low, with 56 per cent unable to identify any iodine-rich food and the majority wrongfully believing dark green vegetables and table salt had high levels.

Most, 84 per cent were unaware that iodine from diet is important for the healthy development of the unborn baby, and only 11 per cent had heard about iodine from a healthcare professional.

"Iodine is crucial during pregnancy and the first months of life, to ensure adequate brain development,

but achieving over 200 micrograms a day of iodine through diet requires regular consumption of iodine-rich foods such as milk and sea fish," Combet said.

There is a need to work towards a solution, she said.

"The most important issue to come from this study, however, was the lack of awareness of the important role iodine plays in foetal development and how to consume adequate levels of this essential mineral. This is something that needs to be addressed," Combet said.