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STRAIGHT TALK WITH DR MIRIAM

In her regular column for *TS*, Dr Miriam Stoppard delivers the truth behind the health headlines

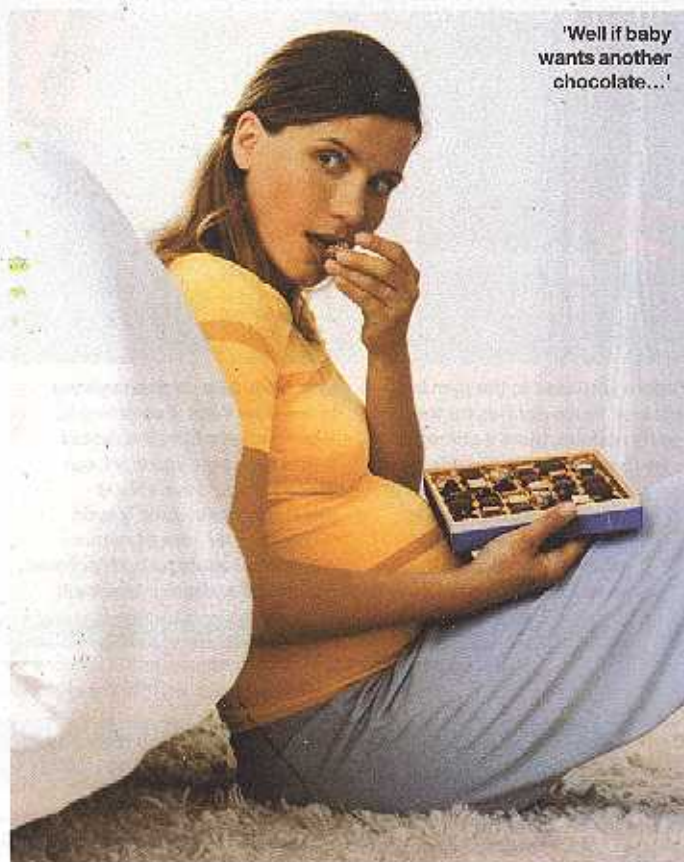
This month: How to have a healthy pregnancy

When you're bombarded with stories about the dangers of everything from paracetamol to peanuts, pregnancy can be a confusing time. There's so much information to absorb and it's important to separate medical facts from fiction. But how do you sift out the worrying rumours and old wives' tales?

There's a whole fridgeful of advice on what you shouldn't eat during pregnancy, from unpasteurised soft cheeses and foods containing raw eggs to undercooked meat and shellfish. Your midwife or doctor will give you good reasons why each of these is to be avoided. But what should you eat? Let me give you a simple guide. If you're anxious about any food, don't eat it! Have something else instead. There's no such thing as an essential food – there's always an alternative. Otherwise, keep your diet healthy and varied, with lots of fresh fruit, vegetables and whole grains.

Here are my three simple-to-follow rules that should help ensure your pregnancy is as safe as possible:

1 Don't take any medicines, especially over-the-counter ones, unless your GP or midwife says it's alright.



'Well if baby wants another chocolate...'

2 Don't smoke. Smoking during pregnancy is the worst thing you can do for your unborn baby – it's linked with miscarriage, stillbirth, damage to the placenta, foetal abnormalities and low birthweight.

3 Don't drink alcohol during pregnancy. Alcohol is a poison

that can damage an unborn baby's brain. No-one can really know how sensitive your baby is to alcohol, so your best bet is to avoid it completely.

● For more advice get *Miriam Stoppard's DVD Having A Baby*, £17.99, available now.



The DIY sexual health check

A new home test for chlamydia, the UK's most common STI, is out now. It means you can avoid an embarrassing test in a clinic and it could also save sufferers from the risk of infertility. Chlamydia affects one in 20 of us but often has no symptoms. If left untreated it can permanently damage your Fallopian tubes, making pregnancy impossible. The HomeChec chlamydia test, £19.99, is available on 0871-871 0691.

NEWS FLASH!

What to eat this month!

SUPERFOOD 1: GARLIC

Garlic has long been hailed as one of the most powerful folk remedies for a cold but until now scientists couldn't prove it actually worked. Finally, a new study has shown that allicin, the active ingredient in garlic, really can protect you against the common cold virus. The only problem is that you'd need to chew 80 raw bulbs to get the right amount! If that doesn't seem very appetising, try odourless capsules from Health Perception. Allimax, £6.99 for 30, is available from good chemists and health food stores nationwide.



SUPERFOOD 2: COCONUT

If you want to boost your weight loss, then give coconut oil a try. New research has revealed it's a wonder fat, containing less calories than other oils and is packed with natural chemicals called medium chain triglycerides (MCT), which encourage calorie-burning. People who switched from cooking with other oils lost up to 38lb in a year, without making any other changes to their diet! And, unlike most things that are good for you, it's actually quite tasty. So, go (coco)nuts! We like Garden of Life Coconut Oil, £11 for 480g, available from Chrisbar Health at www.chrisbar.com.

