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CARE CAUTIONED WHEN TAKING IRON SUPPLEMENTS DURING PREGNANCY

A leading naturopath has cautioned pregnant women against taking iron supplements unless they know for sure that they are low in iron, a warning that is supported by the umbrella group for New Zealand's dietary supplements and natural products industries.

Auckland Naturopath Angela Haldane says many pregnant women mistakenly think they need to take iron supplements during pregnancy because it is common for women to become anaemic (iron deficient) when pregnant. This can lead to tiredness, weaknesses, increased likelihood of pre-term delivery, and the baby suffering from developmental delays.

Ironically, excessive iron during pregnancy can cause the very problems it is trying to prevent.

Ms Haldane says women are increasingly looking for a natural approach to pregnancy, with around 40% of her patients seeking help with preconception, conception, pregnancy and post-natal health: “Although many need dietary supplementation and other forms of natural health support, I am concerned that too many women take iron supplements without first checking that they actually need them.”

Ms Haldane notes women with poor diets and those on regimes that limit certain food groups (e.g. paleo, veganism, gluten- or dairy-free) are particularly at risk of low iron and other types of nutritional deficiencies.

“The best advice is to anyone considering taking iron supplements is to check first and ask their doctor to include iron studies in all blood tests,” she says.

Ms Haldane also cautions pregnant women to check iron levels in any multi-vitamins that they are taking: “Multi-vitamins are a great way of topping up if nutrition is lacking but pregnant women who have good iron levels should avoid products that are high in iron”.

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Alison Quesnel, Executive Director of the dietary supplements and natural products industry umbrella group Natural Products NZ (NPNZ) agrees with Ms Haldane's recommendations: "Natural health products have a recognised complementary role to play in health management and support, which is borne out by the increasing consumer demand worldwide".

"NPNZ strongly encourages people to seek a health practitioner's advice before taking any natural product so as to ensure that the right kind of product and dosage is being taken for that person's needs. In some cases the advice could be that there is no need to take anything at all," she says.

Ms Haldane added that people should avoid using TV advertisements as their primary information source, and that pregnant women in particular should always seek a health professional's advice before taking any kind of preparation.

Both Ms Haldane and Ms Quesnel encourage women who are trying to conceive or are already pregnant to choose healthy lifestyle options. Stress in particular is a major factor in health issues associated with preconception, pregnancy and postnatal wellbeing.

"Finding healthy ways to relax, getting more sleep and having a well-balanced diet with plenty of fresh foods can work wonders," says Ms Haldane.

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Natural Products New Zealand (NPNZ) is a national industry organisation representing this country's natural products, functional foods, complementary medicines, cosmeceuticals and nutraceuticals industries within New Zealand and internationally.

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