

# Fourth Trimester Podcast

## Episode 70: How To Avoid Anemia (Before & After Pregnancy)

**Sarah Trott:** [00:00:05] My name is Sarah Trott. I'm a new mama to a baby girl and this podcast is all about postpartum care for the few months following birth, the time period also known as the Fourth Trimester. My postpartum doula, Esther Gallagher, is my co-host. She's a mother, grandmother, perinatal educator, birth and postpartum care provider. I've benefited hugely from her support. All parents can benefit from the wisdom and support that a postpartum Doula provides. Fourth trimester care is about the practical, emotional and social support parents and baby require, and importantly, helps set the tone for the lifelong journey of parenting.

When I first became pregnant, I had never heard of postpartum Doulas, let alone knew what they did. So much of the training and preparation that expecting parents do is focused on the birth and newborn care. Once a baby is born, often the first interaction parents have with medical or child professionals, other than the first pediatrician visits, is the six-week checkup with the OB/GYN. *What about caring for mama and family between the birth and the six week doctor visit? What are the strategies for taking care of the partner and the rest of the family while looking after your newborn?*

Our podcasts contain expert interviews with specialists from many fields to cover topics including postpartum doula practices, prenatal care, prenatal and postnatal yoga, parenting, breastfeeding, physical recovery from birth, nutrition, newborn care, midwifery, negotiating family visitation, and many more.

First-hand experience is shared through lots of stories from both new and seasoned parents. Hear what other parents are asking and what they have done in their own lives.

We reference other podcasts, internet resources and real-life experts who can help you on your own parenting journey. Visit us at <http://fourthtrimesterpodcast.com>

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:00:40] Hello again It's Esther. I thought it was time to revisit nutrition and nourishment and specific to that anemia. I've touched on this in previous podcasts but I think it's always an important thing for women in general. And mothers in particular to revisit. You know many women don't realize that they require about a 30 percent increase in their blood volume during pregnancy and if that blood volume isn't well supported nutritionally they will become Anemic.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:01:35] They're sharing that blood supply with the growing newborn and that growing newborn is going to need to set down a supply of iron in their own liver prior to birth. That will last them six months. It's how we're made as human beings, probably mammals in general. And part of the reason is that milk is a rather low iron food type, calcium and lots of protein and carbs and all that relative to our growth needs and our blood supply means it's low iron.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:02:19] And so babies get born with hopefully a good supply to draw from during their first six months before they start eating foods. This also protects them from botulism because botulism likes to sort of set itself up on iron molecules and so you know it's important that babies actually aren't taking it a lot of iron in their first six months until their bodies are physiologically prepared to cope with all the kinds of things that might come in there into their mouth. So.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:03:03] So that iron rich or I should like to say nutrient rich blood building foods during pregnancy and in the postpartum recovery phase are very very important. And I want to reiterate what builds nice strong red blood cells. Building a nice red strong red blood cell is not only a good source of iron in the diet but B 12 B 12 is very critical to building a good red blood cell. So if you're not getting adequate 12 or your body is not absorbing creating and absorbing B 12 in appropriate amounts then you will be anemic. OK. Other things that go into good red blood cells are the fat soluble vitamins like vitamin E and A. So we need all of those. And of course you know the vegetarians and vegans amongst you are tired of hearing this and I don't blame you.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:04:20] But what's the food that has all of those factors in quantity. Red meat. So you know if you're anemic. And you can digest red meat and

there are those people who don't do so very easily. But if you're pregnant you probably should be looking for ways to get all of these nutrients and making sure that there is no impediment to absorbing them.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:04:58] So for some of us we were actually going to maybe need to be tested for what's called Pernicious Anemia which is when our bodies aren't absorbing B 12 properly. Right. So we may need to be supplemented with b12 intravenously and might get a shock basically. So that's something. It's rare but it does exist in the world and it's important to know whether or not that's a problem. If you constantly feel exhausted and depressed before you take Prozac you might want to get yourself checked for anemia

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:05:39] And get your B12 levels, your blood circulating B12 levels checked. OK. So since I like to address this podcast not only to pregnant and postpartum parents but those of us who would like to be in support of those wonderful people in our lives. How can we look at this and be sensitive to this particular need for blood building nourishment. Let's start by kind of looking over these sorts of things that might result from anemia. OK. And we'll talk specifically about the postpartum period but let's not neglect how important it is to be addressing these things proactively and during the pregnancy early, mid pregnancy and late in pregnancy as I always say to my prenatal clients.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:06:52] Even though you got checked mid pregnancy and if you were anemic at the time probably put on an iron supplement that supplement may have been very very hard for you to digest and perhaps you needed something a different approach, a more holistic approach. And in any case just because you're taking that supplement doesn't mean that at the end of your pregnancy you will necessarily not be anemic.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:07:23] So it's not a bad idea at the beginning of your sort of six week stretch before giving birth to check again and see how you're doing and whether or not you're building blood but your blood supply the way that will be really really important to you for giving birth and for your postpartum period.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:07:50] And remember just because you go into labor not anemic you make doesn't mean you won't come out of labor anemic if you have a blood loss that is significant, you may be starting your postpartum period anemic and so we want to be mindful of blood building our whole lives. So I wanted to note first some of the signs that might alert us to anemia.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:08:26] So prenatally if you were vomiting excessively and therefore couldn't keep down enough food to keep your blood supply healthy that's going to be a red flag if you just have poor nutrition. That's a red flag.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:08:50] If you had had periods before pregnancy you may have become pregnant and started your pregnancy very anemic.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:08:59] That's a red flag.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:09:00] If you've been pregnant close together if this is second or third pregnancy close to the last pregnancy and didn't have a chance to build to good blood supply you are likely anemic if you're pregnant with multiples. You are very very at risk for anemia your blood supply needs to be extra rich and that by becoming pregnant as a teenager is a red flag for anemia.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:09:31] Which is interesting. I'm glad to know this. Fifty years later 40 years later I was pregnant as a teenager and I was probably anemic. I'm very very sure I was actually. And then of course if you had an injury or or surgery close to being pregnant or during her pregnancy you may have had a blood loss that would alert you to needing to build your blood.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:10:01] Postpartum causes of anemia are Prenatal anemia that went untreated a blood loss that's beyond normal at delivery or in the first moments hours days or weeks postpartum.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:10:20] So if you bled excessively at delivery or in the moments post delivery or find that you're having excessive or prolonged blood loss past the first two to six weeks, You might want to be checked. As you know I am always recommending that my clients before going in for their six week obstetrical checkup or seeing their midwife for their six week checkup get blood work done. And this is one of the parameters we're looking at. You just don't want to have to drag yourself through motherhood anemic - is just too difficult. So we want real anemia out however we can and of course.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:11:10] And I and I'm sad I have to mention this but poor nutrition in the postpartum period will lead to anemia. It will. I see it all the time. And you know it's so interesting how moms will be encouraged encouraged encouraged to eat really great during their pregnancy and then when their postpartum and they barely have the bandwidth to get food into themselves let alone eat the food that somebody might bother to bring them in prepare for them the food that's coming to them is really really not nourishing food.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:11:52] They're expected to be living on baguettes and you know chocolate. Happily chocolate does house admired it but it's not the way to stop being anemic. You know you need really good sources of protein fats and vegetable men you know the minerals that are in vegetables root vegetables particularly. So those are all sort of the red flags for anemia.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:12:24] And you know some of the ways that moms might be alerted to being anemic in the postpartum period would be shortness of breath. OK. So after you've taken a full recovery in the first two to six weeks if you're having difficulty walking up those stairs or walking at all and you find that your heart races you know you just feel short of breath.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:12:58] That's a red flag that you might be anemic. That's a serious red flag for many of us, we don't realize that the fact that we lie down and our heart start racing and we feel anxious might be a signal that we're not just anxious, our bodies are anxious on our behalf and are telling us we need better nutrition. So you

know mild Sleep disorder might be a sign that you're anemic even though this isn't a typical pink flag that is sent out.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:13:43] Naturally just being exhausted all the time while we could point to our lack of sleep if we're sleeping when the baby sleeps and we're still just feeling like we're dragging ourselves around and you know just have very limited physical resources. We certainly need to be addressing this. So how do we get better nutrition? To address anemia. Of course I said red meat. It would be nice if that red meat is accompanied by root vegetables, leafy greens and massive quantities usually cooked if possible and with as a source of vitamin C like citric acid or vinegar.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:14:39] So something that's rich and vitamin C is going to help us absorb the iron and the trout that we need from our foods. If we're not eating red meat and and I will talk about sources of red meat that people might enjoy more than the ones that they're used to in a moment. But if we're not eating red meat then certainly we need to be eating mineral rich foods in quantities so vegetables particularly most root vegetables leafy greens with vitamin C and probably during pregnancy and the postpartum period the breastfeeding period probably supplements.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:15:30] So if you're vegetarian eat a lot of eggs eat those eggs they're a great source of everything that I'm talking about that aren't red meat right if you don't eat eggs and or your vegan and then you're really going to have to look around beans whole grains whole grains. These are OK sources. The thing they're completely lacking in is B12. The cool thing is that tempeh, which is a cultured bean and or grain product it's cultured with a mold, a healthy nutritious mold that is a source of B12.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:16:21] Whether or not it's an adequate source I won't be able to tell you a lot of people like to include nutritional yeast and or brewers yeast in their diet but B12 is actually added to those products so that's great. And some people love those things and find them very nutritious. They can be constipating. So you need to be aware you don't just want to eat a bunch of brewers yeast all at once. You want to sprinkle it throughout your meals throughout the day.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:16:56] Sublingual B12 For those people who are really lacking might be a way to supplement that would really really help you quite a bit and you should notice the difference in your mood and energy level if you're supplementing if you're not noticing the difference and maybe they need to be tested for a pernicious anemia and then finding supplements iron supplements that aren't causing pain.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:17:28] Ok so there are liquid iron and 12 supplements on your natural food stores that are highly recommended for pregnant and postpartum women. Go check those out and see how you respond to them. Make sure you refrigerate them and don't swig from the bottle because they'll go bad. There's also an iron supplement that I found very very helpful and very digestible very non constipation when I was severely anemic and that is a supplement that's called Iron Bisglycinate. And I'm going to spell that: B-i-s-g-l-y-c-i-n-a-t-e.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:18:30] This supplement is really well absorbed and not really hard on the gut. You have to take a lot of it. It is not a power pill that is going to make you feel crappy but probably will find a way to get your anemia status better. It's something that you're going to take all day long with your meals and snacks and just keep it running into your digestive tract and helping you absorb and build that blood. Now it's just iron. It doesn't necessarily have to be 2000 other wonderful nutrients with it so you might really be looking into this again this holistic approach to building your blood those red meat options.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:19:29] Ok here we go. Now I think it's very important that we look for sources of meat if we can find them and afford them that are humanely and environmentally sustainably raised. And the reason for that is selfish. I think that the quality of meat and the levels of potential toxins in meat is way better. And I think that's important when we're pregnant and postpartum. So I personally am not a big fan of beef. I don't. I don't love the taste of it. I can't eat much of it because it just isn't pleasant for me. But sustainably raised beef is a thing now and if beef is your go to go for it and if you will eat liver more power to you got liver packs the best punch for blood building food that exists whatever animal you might get from.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:20:43] I personally am a huge fan of organically raised sustainably raised lambs liver. They're smaller, they're richer. Lambs eat a lot of good stuff not just grass and so I like the idea that they're eating more of a holistic diet if possible but any animal that produces red meat. Now if you just can't stomach red meat but you only eat poultry then you should be eating those thighs. Forget that breast meat. Is kind of Nice but really those thighs are going to pack just such a better punch.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:21:42] Also when you buy a whole chicken. Make sure they've left the liver and heart and if you're the pregnant person, if you're the post-partum person somebody should prepare those really deliciously for you. And those are yours to eat.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:22:04] Yeah. So very very very important. And of course let's not forget that fatty fish, if you can find healthy sources of that environmentally appropriate sources for these two are going to be very very important for blood building and brain building During your pregnancy.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:22:29] But let's not forget the good fruits by the way. Figs. Now I don't want pregnant moms and postpartum moms living on fruit as you know. I think it should be a treat but if we're giving a treat to somebody who we know needs to build blood that treat should not be sugar the treat should be healthy fruit dates figs black mission figs are excellent. Maybe make a compost with organic apricot dried figs, raisins, a little bit of cinnamon and some lemon juice and stew that up till it's nice and soft and easy to digest and hydrating and give that to. That new mom. I'm a little bit of ice cream, maybe here and there or just her oatmeal in the morning. OK. So that's the way to get a little bit of sweetness into this mom's diet. And don't forget when we're eating those strong proteins that we need. Good stomach acid to properly digest them.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:23:55] So moms lightly salt your food so that you can actually produce hydrochloric acid that will break them down appropriately and help you absorb all the nutrients.



**Esther Gallagher:** [00:24:12] Ok. All right. So I hope everyone's well. I hope those of you who see yourself as care providers understand why it's important to bring new parents nourishing blood building foods and that when you bring those foods over you will feel really good about how you are helping those new parents fortify themselves for the very very intensive time they're spending being new parents for that baby.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:24:55] All right. Well there we go. Hopefully you'll take the time to visit our Website [fourthtrimesterpodcast.com](http://fourthtrimesterpodcast.com) , our Facebook page and our fan page and consider supporting us with your donation and subscription.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:25:20] We love bringing you our knowledge and our wonderful guest interviews and sometimes fun and hilarity and we love hearing from you at our Web site and on our Facebook page comments. And we hope to be able to continue bringing you shows that we hope you find valuable.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:25:48] All right well take care until next time. Love you all. This is Esther Gallagher. Bye bye.

**Sarah Trott:** You can find out more about Esther Gallagher on <http://www.esthergallagher.com/>. You can also subscribe to this podcast in order to hear more from us. [Click here for iTunes](#) and [click here for Google Podcasts](#). Thank you for listening everyone and I hope you'll join us next time on the Fourth Trimester. The theme music on this podcast was created by Sean Trott. Hear more at <https://soundcloud.com/seantrott>. Special thanks to my true loves: my husband Ben, daughter Penelope, and baby girl Evelyn. Don't forget to share the Fourth Trimester Podcast with any new and expecting parents. I'm Sarah Trott. Goodbye for now.