

Use of Red Palm Oil for the Promotion of Maternal Vitamin A Status

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Abstract

Ninety rural Tanzanian women were recruited during the last three months of pregnancy and divided into three study groups: a control group given dietary advice to promote intake of dark-green leafy vegetables, a group given dietary advice plus sunflower oil, and a group given dietary advice plus red palm oil. Supplementing pregnant women with red palm oil, which is rich in provitamin A, increased their plasma and breastmilk concentrations of α - and β -carotene significantly, whereas women given sunflower oil had significantly higher amounts of α -tocopherol in their plasma and breastmilk than the control group. Moreover, the consumption of either red palm oil or sunflower oil retarded the decline in the concentration of retinol in breastmilk as seen in the control group during the progression of lactation. This indicates that the consumption of an oil rich in α - and β -carotene or α -tocopherol promotes retinol levels in breastmilk.