

HEALTHY EATING DURING PREGNANCY

A well balanced diet is important for good health, not only during pregnancy but even before conception. This ensures you have a good store of nutrients to meet the demands of your developing baby. Contrary to popular belief, you do not need to consume twice the amount of food that you usually do – it's the quality of what you eat, not always the quantity, that is important.

What is a healthy diet? A good general rule is to cut down on sugar, fat and salt and eat more fresh fruit, vegetables and high fibre cereals. If you are already on a special diet for medical reasons, make sure to consult your doctor or dietitian. The table below provides guidelines to help you meet your requirements.

Healthy foods to enjoy:

Group 1 : Meat, Fish and other proteins – 3 servings daily for protein and iron. One serving is:

- 50g cooked lean meat or poultry
- 75g cooked fish
- 2 eggs
- 200ml cup of cooked beans, peas or pulses

Group 2 : Milk and Dairy – 5 servings daily for calcium, vitamins, minerals and protein. One serving is :

- 200 ml (1/3 pint) low-fat milk (vitamin D fortified)
- 25g Light cheddar cheese
- 1 small bowl cottage cheese
- 125g low fat yoghurt

Group 3 : Cereal, breads and other starches – 6-9 servings daily for vitamins, minerals, energy and fibre. One serving is:

- 1 small bowl breakfast cereal (wholegrain)
- 1 medium potato or yam
- 3 dessertspoons cooked pasta or rice
- 1 slice of bread (preferably wholegrain)
- 1 small pitta, chapatti or naan

Group 4 : Fruit and Vegetables – more than 5 servings daily for vitamins, minerals, antioxidants and fibre. One serving is:

- 125 ml unsweetened fruit juice
- 1 medium piece of fresh fruit or two small ones
- 3 dessertspoons cooked fruit or vegetables
- 1 bowl homemade vegetable soup
- Small bowl of salad greens

Healthy fats

Use mainly monounsaturated and polyunsaturated oils in cooking, such as olive, rapeseed and safflower oils. Use small amounts of butter and enjoy nuts, seeds, oily fish and avocado as heart-healthy additions.

Do not skip meals!

Always take regular meals and snacks, evenly spaced throughout the day, to ensure you are able to eat all the foods you need and keep your energy up.

Important nutrients

Iron is necessary for healthy blood. Good dietary sources include meat, fish, poultry and egg yolks, green leafy vegetables, fortified breakfast cereals, peas, beans, and lentils. In addition, foods rich in *Vitamin C* such as citrus fruits (oranges or grapefruits) can help the absorption of iron from your food, whereas strong tea or coffee can prevent it. Because of the high requirements of iron during pregnancy, your doctor may prescribe iron tablets for you, if necessary.

Folate and Folic acid is a vitamin essential for the formation and healthy growth of cells in your baby's body and can help prevent some birth defects, such as Spina Bifida. Folate is found in dark green leafy vegetables, Bovril and Marmite. Folic acid is found in fortified breakfast cereals and breads. Women are advised to take folic acid supplements until 12 weeks, and some women may be advised to continue throughout pregnancy.

Calcium is essential for the development of healthy teeth and bones. Good dietary sources include milk, yoghurt, and cheese. Smaller amounts are found in green vegetables and softened bones of tinned fish like sardines and salmon. If you don't like milk, cheese or yoghurt, discuss alternative sources with your doctor or dietitian.

Vitamin D is important for calcium absorption. Eggs, fortified milk and margarines, fortified breakfast cereals and oily fish such as salmon, sardines, herring and tuna are good sources of Vitamin D. Your body also makes Vitamin D from sunlight in summer months, so try to spend some time outdoors.

Omega-3 has been shown to improve babies' brain development. The best source is oily fish, e.g. salmon, trout, mackerel, kippers and herring. Flaxseed and linseed contain Omega-3 but they also affect hormones and the ideal amounts are unknown.

Common problems during pregnancy

Morning sickness, despite its name, can occur at any time during the day for the first 12 to 15 weeks. Small frequent meals throughout the day may help. Take dry food, such as dry toast without butter, or plain biscuits. Sip fluids slowly throughout the day and suck on ice-cubes or ice-pops.

Constipation is a common problem and can be relieved by regular exercise and increasing your combined fibre and fluid intake. High fibre foods include wholegrain

breakfast cereals, wholemeal bread, wholewheat pasta, wholegrain rice, fruit and vegetables. *Raw bran is best avoided as it can interfere with the absorption of important nutrients.* Drink at least 8 to 10 cups of fluid daily including water, unsweetened fruit juices, but drink tea or coffee in moderation.

Heartburn may be a problem, especially during the end of pregnancy. Eating small, frequent meals and avoiding large meals late at night will help. Avoid spicy and fatty foods, fizzy drinks. Milky foods may help alleviate the symptoms. Try to relax at mealtimes.

A guide to weight gain

Everyone has different energy and weight gain requirements in pregnancy, depending on pre-pregnancy weight. The best guide is your rate of weight gain and appetite. Recommended weight gain is between 6.8 to 15.9 kg (about 1 to 2.5 stone) for a single baby. It will be more if you are underweight, carrying twins or multiple babies. Most of your weight gain will occur in the last half of pregnancy (just under half a kilo or one pound each week if your weight is normal).

If you are gaining too much weight or gaining it too quickly, cut down on fried and fatty foods, sweets, cakes, biscuits and sugary foods and drinks. These foods have loads of calories but little nutrition. Focus on the food groups at the beginning of this factsheet. ***Do not try to lose weight when you are pregnant.***

Foods to avoid

Some foods should be avoided during pregnancy because they can contain bacteria, high levels of Vitamin A or other toxins, like mercury, that may be harmful to you and your unborn baby.

- Avoid soft boiled or raw eggs, eg in homemade mayonnaise, mousse or cheesecake.
- Do not take cod liver oil.
- Avoid soft, mold-ripened or unpasteurized cheeses like Camembert, Brie, Stilton, blue cheese. It is safe to eat pasturized and fresh cheddar, Blarney, Mozzarella, Edam and Parmesan cheeses, cottage cheese and cream cheese.
- Limit all caffeine containing drinks (coffee, tea, colas, energy drinks) to 3 or 4 a day.
- Avoid soft, whipped ice cream.
- Avoid swordfish, marlin, shark and tilefish.
- Limit your tuna intake to one fresh steak or two medium tins of tuna per week (280g total).
- Avoid pâté, raw fish sushi and raw, undercooked or reheated meat, poultry or fish, and smoked uncooked fish.
- Avoid liver and liver products.
- Always check 'sell by' and 'best before' dates on all food and drink.

Food hygiene

- It is important to handle food properly and practice good hand washing daily to prevent food poisoning and infection.

- Wash hands after handling animals, after using the toilet and before preparing food or eating.
- Use separate cutting boards for raw meat versus cooked.
- Use separate cutting boards for meat versus fruit and vegetables.
- Keep fridge at less than 5 degrees Celsius and freezer less than minus 18 degrees Celsius.
- Clean cutting boards with food-safe disinfectant.
- Wash all fruit, vegetables and salads carefully
- Store raw meat at the bottom of the fridge to prevent juices dripping on to other foods.
- Reheat left over food until it is steaming hot
- When eating at restaurants or takeaways, make sure food looks, smells and tastes fresh.
- For more tips on food hygiene check out www.safefood.eu

Alcohol should be avoided during pregnancy. It is not recommended and may harm your baby.

Smoking

Smoking harms your baby's development. Speak to your midwife about ways to stop.

Vitamin supplements

Speak to your doctor, midwife or dietitian before taking any supplements.

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