



Nutrition During Pregnancy



Pregnancy is the most important time in your life to practice good nutrition. The food you eat is the same food that nourishes your unborn baby. It is vital that you choose nutritious foods that will assure your baby's proper growth and development.

A Healthy Diet

Eating a wide variety of foods is one of the best ways to be sure you are getting the nutrients your developing baby needs. Every day you need the following number of servings (a serving is defined in parentheses):

- 6-11 servings of **whole grain foods** (½ cup rice or cereal; ½ English muffin, hamburger bun or bagel; 1 slice of bread; ¾ cup of crackers)
- 3-5 servings of **vegetables** (½ to 1 cup, raw or cooked)
- 2-4 servings of **fruit** (1 piece of fruit; ¾ cup of juice; ½ cup chopped fruit; ¼ cup dried fruit)
- 3 servings of high **protein** foods (2 ½ or 3 ounces of cooked meat, poultry or fish; 1 ½ cups cooked beans; 2 or 3 eggs; 2 tablespoons of peanut butter)
- 3-4 servings of **dairy products** (1 cup of milk or yogurt; 1 and ½ ounces of hard cheese; 1 cup frozen yogurt)
- Fats, oils, and sweets should be eaten sparingly.

Be Sure to Include:

Folic Acid. Folic acid is a B-vitamin that is essential for the normal development of your baby. A lack of folic acid can result in birth defects involving the neural tube. The neural tube develops into your baby's spinal cord, spine, brain, and skull. You need 400 micrograms (0.4 milligrams) of folic acid every day. Your prenatal vitamin may contain 400 mcg. of folic acid, or you can take a folic acid pill. An easy way to get folic acid is by eating a bowl of a folic acid fortified breakfast cereal every day. Read the labels on cereal boxes and choose one that contains 100% of the daily folic acid requirement. Many other foods also contain folic acid. Good sources include spinach, broccoli, citrus fruits, liver, dried peas, and beans.

Calcium. Calcium is needed to build your baby's bones and tooth buds. Eat four or more servings a day of calcium-rich foods. The best sources of calcium are skim milk, hard cheese, cottage cheese, frozen yogurt and yogurt. Other good sources of include spinach, broccoli, oranges, corn tortillas, soybeans, kale, and almonds.

Fiber. Eating a lot of fresh fruits and vegetables, along with whole grain breads and cereals, will add fiber to your diet. This will help you avoid constipation.

Fluids. Drinking 6-8 glasses of water or other fluids is another safeguard against constipation. Consuming plenty of fluids will also prevent dehydration. Water and other fluids help carry waste products out of your body. If you have morning sickness you may feel better if you avoid citrus juices, milk, coffee, and tea.

Be Sure to Avoid:

Alcohol. Do not drink alcohol while you are pregnant. Drinking alcohol puts your baby at risk for Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS). FAS can cause mental retardation, heart defects, and facial deformities.

Soft Cheeses. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recommends that pregnant women not eat soft cheeses. Soft cheeses can harbor bacteria that can cause your baby to get sick or die. Soft cheeses include Brie, feta, Roquefort, and Mexican-style cheeses. Hard cheeses like cheddar are safe to eat during pregnancy.

Raw or undercooked meat, seafood, eggs, or poultry. These may be contaminated with bacteria. During pregnancy you may be more susceptible to these.

Shark, swordfish, king mackerel and tile fish. The FDA now recommends that pregnant women avoid eating these four species of fish. They may contain methyl mercury in amounts high enough to harm your unborn baby. Before you eat fresh water fish, trim the fat away. Other kinds of toxins may collect in the fat of these fish.

Weight Gain

During pregnancy you need about 300 extra calories a day. During the first three months most women gain 2-4 pounds. After that, they gain about 3-4 pounds each month. A total weight gain of 25-30 pounds is typical for women whose weight was normal before pregnancy. If you were overweight or underweight before you got pregnant, or if you are carrying more than one baby, talk to your doctor about the weight gain that is right for you. Never try to diet when you are pregnant. Nursing your newborn will help you lose weight. A nursing mother uses 500 more calories a day than a woman who is not nursing.

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