Nutrition for Pregnancy

This fact sheet provides you with advice on good nutrition and food safety during pregnancy.

Healthy eating during pregnancy

Following a healthy diet and eating a variety of nutritious foods while pregnant will help your baby to grow strong and healthy.

When pregnant, you need to meet your own nutritional needs and also those of your baby, but you do not need to ‘eat for two’.

The types of food you eat is more important than the amount of food that you eat. In fact, when you are pregnant, your need for energy (calories/kilojoules) is only slightly higher than normal.

Calcium, iron, omega 3 fatty acids, iodine, and folate are all examples of nutrients which are very important during pregnancy.

For a healthy pregnancy, choose a wide variety of foods every day, to ensure you meet you and your baby’s nutrition needs. Try to:

- Eat a variety of vegetables, fruit, wholegrain breads and cereals, lean meat, fish, poultry and /or alternatives such as eggs or beans/legumes, every day.
- Include milk, yoghurts, cheeses and /or alternatives (e.g. calcium fortified milk alternatives such as So Good™ almond milk).
- Limit intake of foods high in saturated fat, salt and sugar. (Eg. Processed foods such as cookies and cakes, or fast foods such as burgers, fried chicken, fries and pizza)
- Drink plenty of water
- Avoid alcohol during pregnancy

Visit the Australian Government’s ‘Healthy Eating During your Pregnancy’ guidelines for further advice on following a healthy diet during pregnancy: www.eatforhealth.gov.au//healthy-eating-when-youre-pregnant-or-breastfeeding
Key nutrients during pregnancy

Do I need to take a vitamin and mineral supplement?

- Many women choose to take a pregnancy specific multivitamin during pregnancy.
- They are safe to take, and can provide the extra folate and iodine required during pregnancy, as well as additional amounts of other nutrients such as iron and calcium.
- Check with your doctor, pharmacist or dietitian before taking any vitamin, mineral or herbal supplements. You can also contact the Medicines and Drug Information Centre at the Women’s and Children’s Hospital (WCH) if you have questions regarding supplements on (08) 8161 7555.

Folate

It has been shown that extra folate in the early stages of pregnancy can reduce the chance of having a baby with a neural tube defect such as spina bifida.

- Folate can be found in green leafy vegetables, some fruits and legumes. Some foods such as bread, breakfast cereals and juices may have folate added to them.
- However, even if you eat foods that contain folate, it is still difficult to get the extra folate needed during early pregnancy.
- **It is recommended you take a 0.5 milligrams (mg) folate (folic acid) tablet per day, for at least one month before pregnancy and during the first three months of pregnancy, or a pregnancy specific multivitamin that contains this amount of folate.**
- Some women may be at a higher risk of having a baby with a neural tube defect, and may need a higher dose of folate. Check with your doctor if you are uncertain.

Calcium

Calcium is important during pregnancy to help your baby build strong, healthy bones and teeth. It also helps to keep your own bones strong.

- Good sources of calcium include dairy foods such as milk, yoghurt and cheese, or calcium fortified dairy alternatives.
- Aim to include around 2.5 serves of dairy or alternatives each day.
- If you are under 18 years of age, you will need to eat even more dairy as your bones are still developing, so aim for 3.5 serves each day.
- Examples of one serve of dairy include:
  - 1 cup of milk
  - 200g yoghurt
  - 2 slices of pregnancy safe cheese (eg. Cheddar cheese)
Iron

Iron is needed for making blood and carrying oxygen around the body. When you are pregnant, you need a lot more iron than normal. If you don’t consume enough iron, you may become iron deficient and develop anaemia.

- Animal sources of iron: Red meat is a great source of iron. It can also be found in chicken and fish.
- Plant-based sources of iron: Wholemeal/wholegrain breads, iron-fortified cereals, legumes (eg. Chickpeas, beans and lentils) and green leafy vegetables (eg. Kale).
- The iron from animal foods (red meat, chicken, and fish) is more easily absorbed by your body than iron in plant foods (legumes, green leafy vegetables). If you follow a vegan or vegetarian diet, an iron supplement may be needed to help meet your iron needs during pregnancy. Consult with your GP to check your iron levels.

  o For further information on vegan/vegetarian diets and iron, visit the “Healthy eating for vegetarian or vegan pregnant or breastfeeding mothers” NEMO resource: https://www.health.qld.gov.au/antenatal-veganveget

**Vitamin C helps our body absorb iron more easily. Consume high vitamin C foods, such as fruits and vegetables, together with iron foods. For example, eat an iron-fortified cereal, paired with a glass of orange juice.**

Iodine

Iodine is important for the development of your baby’s brain and nervous system. Extra iodine is needed in pregnancy and it can be difficult to get enough iodine through food alone.

- **It is recommended that all women who are pregnant, breastfeeding or considering pregnancy, take an iodine supplement of 150 micrograms (µg) each day or a pregnancy specific multivitamin that contains this amount of iodine.**
- Women with pre-existing thyroid conditions should seek advice from their doctor before taking an iodine supplement.

Omega 3 Fatty Acids

Omega 3 fatty acids are essential for your baby’s development. Good sources of omega 3 are fatty fish such as salmon, sardines, mackerel and herring.

- Consuming fish 2-3 times a week can help to ensure a good intake of omega-3. See page 7 for information on mercury in fish.
- Women who do not consume this recommended amount of fatty fish in their diet should consider omega-3 supplementation. Discuss with your GP.
Vitamin D

Vitamin D is essential for your body to absorb and use calcium. Vitamin D is absorbed through your skin’s exposure to direct sunlight. Only very small amounts of vitamin D come from food.

- Consult with your GP to assess your risk of vitamin D deficiency. If you are deemed at risk, your doctor may recommend a high dose vitamin D supplement.
- Women who are pregnant and not at risk of vitamin D deficiency should still take a supplement or multivitamin containing cholecalciferol 400 units daily.

Other Important Information for Women during Pregnancy

How much weight should I gain?

Weight gain is a normal part of a healthy pregnancy. How much weight you gain depends on many things, including your pre-pregnancy weight and body mass index (BMI). If you are overweight, pregnancy is not a safe time for trying to lose weight - unless specifically instructed by your doctor. Weight loss is best achieved before pregnancy or as a long-term goal after your baby is born.

To calculate your pre-pregnancy Body Mass Index (BMI), divide your weight (in kilograms) by your height (in metres) squared. Or, visit this BMI calculator website: https://www.heartfoundation.org.au/bmi-calculator.

See Table 1 below to determine your recommended ideal weight gain during pregnancy:

Table 1 – Ideal weight gain during pregnancy, based on pre-pregnancy BMI category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-pregnancy BMI (m/kg²)</th>
<th>Ideal weight gain during whole pregnancy</th>
<th>*Recommended rate per week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Underweight (BMI &lt;18.5)</td>
<td>12.5-18 kg</td>
<td>0.5 kg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthy weight (BMI 18.5-24.9)</td>
<td>11.5-16 kg</td>
<td>0.4 kg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overweight (BMI 25-29.9)</td>
<td>7-11.5 kg</td>
<td>0.3 kg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obese (BMI &gt;30)</td>
<td>5-9 kg</td>
<td>0.2 kg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twin Pregnancy</td>
<td>17-25 kg</td>
<td>0.6 kg</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*2nd and 3rd trimesters. In the first trimester weight gain is usually only around 1-1.5kg. Talk to your doctor, midwife or dietitian if you are overweight or obese.
Food safety during pregnancy

When you are pregnant, hormonal changes lower your immunity, so you and your baby are at higher risk of food-related illnesses and infections. If you have any concerns about symptoms or illness, please consult your doctor.

By following the food safety recommendations below you can help prevent food-related illnesses and infections such as toxoplasmosis, salmonella and Listeriosis.

Reducing Listeriosis Risk

Listeriosis is a rare but serious illness caused by the bacterium Listeria. It causes few or no symptoms to the mother, but can be transferred to your baby and can lead to miscarriage, still birth, premature birth or make a newborn ill.

You can reduce the risk of Listeriosis by taking simple food hygiene steps at home, and by avoiding:

- Undercooked or raw meats, chilled pre-cooked meats and pate/meat spreads
- Unpasteurised dairy products (Eg. Milk), and soft cheeses (Eg. Brie)
- Raw egg containing products (Eg. Mayonnaise and Hollandaise sauce)

Table 2 - Foods which are considered high risk during pregnancy, and the safer food option to choose.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food type</th>
<th>Foods to avoid</th>
<th>Safer choices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cold meats/ cooked chicken</td>
<td>• Cold meats from delicatessen counters and sandwich bars, and packaged sliced processed meats (e.g. ham, salami). &lt;br&gt; • Cold cooked ready-to-eat chicken (whole, portions, or diced). &lt;br&gt; • Refrigerated pate and meat spreads.</td>
<td>Home cooked meat stored in the fridge and eaten the next day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salads (fruit and vegetables)</td>
<td>• Pre-prepared or pre-packaged fruit or vegetable salads, including those from buffets and salad bars, including sushi bars.  &lt;br&gt; • Rockmelon.</td>
<td>Freshly made salads with well washed vegetables. Washed whole fruit or freshly made fruit salad.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chilled seafood</td>
<td>• Chilled seafood such as raw oysters, sashimi and sushi &lt;br&gt; • Smoked ready-to-eat seafood (Eg. Smoked salmon) &lt;br&gt; • Cooked ready-to-eat prawns.</td>
<td>Well-cooked seafood including shellfish. Canned salmon and tuna.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egg</td>
<td>• Foods containing raw egg must be avoided, due to the salmonella risk &lt;br&gt; • Mayonnaise, hollandaise sauce, Tiramisu, soft serve and traditional ice-cream containing raw egg yolk.</td>
<td>Choose dressings/sauces without raw egg (Eg. Vinaigrette) &lt;br&gt; Choose regular ice-cream or sorbets</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### General Food Safety Guidelines

- Wash hands and food utensils (knives and cutting board) before and after handling or preparing any food.
- Store uncooked meats separate from vegetables, cooked foods and ready-to-eat foods. Store meat below other foods so there is no chance it will drip onto other foods.
- Always thaw ready-to-eat frozen food in the fridge or microwave. Don’t thaw on the bench at room temperature.
- Avoid foods past their ‘best before’ or ‘use by’ date.
- Make sure ready-to-eat hot food is served steaming hot and keep cold food cold.
- Avoid raw meat, poultry, fish, and undercooked eggs (includes raw egg mayonnaise and some ice creams). Ensure these are cooked thoroughly.
- Avoid raw seed sprouts (e.g. alfalfa, snow pea sprouts etc.).
- Eat only freshly cooked food, however if leftovers are stored promptly they can be eaten within a day. Cover and cool in the fridge, not on the bench.
- Avoid hummus, tahini and other dips containing tahini (hummus and tahini may contain Salmonella and should be avoided).
- Avoid unpasteurised fruit juices.
- Avoid rockmelon.

### Food type | Foods to avoid | Safer choices
--- | --- | ---
Dairy products | • Soft, semi soft and surface ripened cheeses such as brie, camembert, ricotta, feta and blue cheese.  
• Unpasteurised milk (e.g. raw goat’s milk). | Soft cheese cooked in dishes and served hot (e.g. ricotta cannelloni).  
Hard cheeses, cottage cheese, cream cheese (look for intact packaging and follow the advice on the package for how long to use before discarding).  
Pasteurised milk.

Other products | • Tahini/hummus dip containing tahini  
• Taramasalata dip | Bean, guacamole or Tzatziki style dips

For more information visit [www.foodstandards.gov.au](http://www.foodstandards.gov.au)
What do I need to know about mercury in fish?

Fish is an excellent source of nutrients. Mercury, a naturally occurring heavy metal found in our environment, can build up in some types of fish. Pregnant women must be careful with the amounts/type of fish they eat, to reduce risks from mercury.

Following these guidelines will ensure that you and your baby do not get too much mercury.

If you are pregnant or planning a pregnancy, you can eat up to:

- 2-3 portions* of any fish or seafood per week not listed below, or
- 1 portion* of sea perch/orange or catfish per week and no other fish consumed that week, or
- 1 portion* per fortnight of shark (flake) or swordfish/ broadbill/ marlin and no other fish consumed that fortnight.

*1 portion of fish = 150g

Can I drink alcohol while I am pregnant?

If you are pregnant, the safest option is to avoid alcohol completely during pregnancy as even a small amount of alcohol may harm foetal development and have lifelong effects.

For women in South Australia seeking support to stop drinking, contact the Alcohol and Drug Information Service (24-hour counselling) 1300 131 340.

How much caffeine can I have?

Tea, coffee and cola drinks contain caffeine. Large amounts of caffeine may increase the risk of miscarriage or a low birth weight baby. Over 24-hours, drink no more than:

- a single shot of espresso coffee (e.g. small latte or equivalent), or 3 cups of instant style coffee, or
- 4 cups of tea, or
- 4 cans (375ml) cola drinks.

Energy drinks are not recommended during pregnancy, as they are high in caffeine.

If I am having twins or triplets, do I have to eat more food?

If you are pregnant with twins or triplets, you need more calcium, protein, iron and folate than mothers having a single baby. The quality of your diet is even more important to make sure you meet the needs of both yourself and your babies. Speak to your doctor or dietitian if you need further advice.
Other nutrition concerns during pregnancy

Morning sickness, constipation, and indigestion are all conditions that can occur in pregnancy. These conditions can cause unpleasant symptoms for some women. If you are experiencing symptoms from any of these conditions or severe, constant vomiting, please ask your midwife, dietitian or doctor for more information.

Key Points

- Pregnant women should follow a healthy balanced diet, choosing a variety of foods from each food group every day.
- There are key nutrients that women need more of during pregnancy (Eg. iron, folate and iodine). Some women cannot get enough of these nutrients from food. Consult with your GP or dietitian, as they may recommend an appropriate supplement or multivitamin to meet these needs during pregnancy.
- Healthy weight gain is a normal part of pregnancy.
- Food safety during pregnancy is extremely important, to protect you and your baby from any food-related illnesses or infections.
- Alcohol is to be avoided during pregnancy, to keep your baby safe.