
Healthy Eating During Pregnancy

During pregnancy, you need to consume enough calories, protein, fluids, vitamins, and minerals to meet the needs for you and your baby. With a few adjustments, you can apply the same Healthy Eating guidelines you would use at other times of your life.

Whole Grains

Whole grains provide fiber, vitamins and minerals that are processed out of the refined grain products. Check the “fiber” on the Nutrition Label. Look for at least 2-3 grams of fiber in each serving. Aim for at least 28 grams of fiber daily.

Fruits

Choose whole or frozen fruit whenever possible. Whole or frozen fruit provides more fiber and may be more satisfying. Limit intake of fruit juice as the fiber has been removed. If you have diabetes or gestational diabetes, talk to your dietitian as fruit juice can increase blood glucose levels.

Vegetables (variety)

Orange/yellow and most dark green leafy veggies are usually higher in Vitamin A. Various colored vegetables contain flavonoids and other beneficial nutrients. Eating a variety of vegetables helps you get the trace vitamins and minerals you and the baby need in small but important amounts.

Milk

Milk contains nutrients such as Vitamin D, calcium, and phosphorus—all important in maintaining healthy bones. If you can't drink milk, you may be able to tolerate yogurt or cottage cheese. Lactase-treated milk is also available if you are lactose intolerant. Almond, Oat, and Soy milk are usually fortified with vitamins and minerals but are usually lower in protein.

Meats and Proteins

You need protein to maintain your muscles and other lean tissue (and help your baby grow). Aim to eat at least 2-4 ounces of protein per meal. Aim for at least 80 grams of protein daily.

Fats

Choose heart healthy fats such as olive oil, avocado, walnuts, almonds, and nuts. Limit fried foods to special occasions.

Foods to Avoid or Limit During Pregnancy

Alcohol

Alcohol can increase the risk of miscarriage. It can also cause low birth weight, and other issues such as learning disabilities. There is no “safe” amount of alcohol consumption during pregnancy.

Caffeine

Caffeine’s effect on your baby is not clear, but it is a stimulant. Caffeine is found in coffee, tea, colas, “energy drinks”, and chocolate. Limit your caffeine intake to less than 200 mg per day.

Mercury-containing fish and seafood

Mercury is naturally found in almost every type of fish and shellfish. Mercury is especially harmful to your baby during pregnancy. Stick to the lower-mercury fish, and limit your intake to 12 ounces or less a week:

- **Low-mercury fish (12 ounces or less per week):** Shrimp, canned light tuna, salmon, Pollock, catfish
- **Moderate-mercury fish (only 6 ounces or less per week):** Albacore (white) tuna
- **High-mercury fish – AVOID THESE:** Shark, swordfish, king mackerel, tilefish

Raw or undercooked foods

Raw and undercooked meats (and foods mixed with these meats) may contain pathogens that can make you and your baby sick. Be especially careful with eggs, chicken, fish, and shellfish. Heat any leftovers and ready-to-eat foods (such as hot dogs, deli meats, and cold cuts) to at least 140 degrees (steaming hot is safe) before eating.

Unpasteurized foods

Pasteurization kills bacteria that could harm you and your baby. Avoid milk, cheese and juice that hasn’t been pasteurized. Unpasteurized cheeses include Brie, feta, Camembert, and blue cheese.

Tips to deal with Challenges and Special Situations:

Morning sickness

This is common early in pregnancy, and sometimes persists. Simple carbohydrates such as dry toast or crackers may be easier to handle, especially first thing in the morning. Smaller, more frequent meals also help. Avoid strong smells if the smell of food causes nausea. Try eating “cold” foods. Higher fat or fried foods may also be harder to handle. Drink liquids between meals if you get too full at meals. Ask your provider about using Vitamin B6 or ginger to help improve your symptoms.

Constipation

You will need more fluid during your pregnancy. Drink at least 10 cups of non-caffeinated fluid each day. Eating enough fiber is also important. Fresh fruits, fresh vegetables (especially cooked dried beans) and whole grains/cereals are good fiber sources. Stay as active as you can, but always let your health care provider know before starting an exercise program.

Heartburn

Don't lie down right after you eat—take a short walk if you can instead! Keep your meals smaller and more frequent. Limit caffeine, chocolate, and spicy foods. Elevate the head of your bed a few inches.

Vegetarians and Vegans

A vegetarian or vegan diet can be very healthy if you get enough protein and concentrate on eating fresh fruits, fresh vegetables, and whole grains. You can get your protein by eating dried beans, nuts, and soy products. If you choose to consume them eggs and milk are also good protein sources. Look for foods fortified with iron and vitamin B-12 and be sure to take your prenatal multivitamin.

Cravings

You may have cravings for foods such as chocolate, pickles, or certain flavors of ice cream. Don't let these cravings crowd out the healthy food choices you need to nourish you and your baby. When possible, incorporate food cravings into meals and snacks that meet your needs. You might also have cravings for non-food items such as clay, dirt, laundry starch and chalk, or ice. This is called pica. If you have these cravings, alert your provider, since they might signal or lead to other health issues such as anemia.

Physical Activity

If you are healthy and your pregnancy is normal, it is safe to continue or start physical activity. Women with certain conditions such as twins/triplets, placenta previa, preterm labor, preeclampsia or severe anemia may be asked to avoid physical activity. Exercise during pregnancy has benefits to both mom and baby. Walking, swimming, yoga, low impact aerobics classes, and riding a stationary bike are all safe choices.