Nutrition in Pregnancy

Introduction

Eating well when pregnant is one of the first and best gifts you can give to your baby. What you choose to eat will influence your health and his. You might be unsure about what is right for you to eat at this moment, that is why we designed this guide to help you and to answer your questions.

Weight Gain

- Steady, gradual weight gain achieved through balanced and healthy nutrition is best for you and your baby
- The recommended weight gain depends on your weight prior to pregnancy. A range of 7-16 kgs is considered acceptable. Overweight women should aim for the lowest weight gain unlike underweight mothers who should aim for the highest end of the range. If pregnant with more than one baby, you need to gain 16-23 kgs
- Pregnancy is not a good time to diet or try to lose weight.
- Contact your doctor and dietitian if you experience intractable nausea and vomiting leading to weight loss

General Advice

- Vary your meals. Include protein (like egg, poultry or fish), carbohydrate (like fruit, vegetables or cereal) and healthy fat (like olive oil or nuts) in every meal and snack
- While awake, try to eat every 3 hours
- Plan for an occasional treat every once in a while
- Drink plenty of water. Limit soft drinks, coffee, juice drinks and other sweetened beverages
- Try to be physically active. Consult your doctor
- You need to eat enough but that doesn’t mean “Eating for two”
Sample Meals and Snacks

Breakfast
- Whole grain cereal with strawberries, low fat milk
- Hard cooked egg, 2 slices whole grain toast, tomato, orange juice
- Low fat labni, ¼ loaf whole grain arabic bread, cucumber, apple

Snack
- Pudding with nuts
- Low fat yogurt with fruit
- Small handful of raisins

Lunch
- Macaroni with meat, green bean with oil, low fat yogurt, peach
- Fish fillet, baked potato, broccoli, side salad, banana
- Cooked yogurt with meat, rice, eggplant salad, pear

Snack
- Peanut butter sandwich
- Low fat cheese and whole wheat toast
- Plain popped corn

Dinner
- Chicken, rice and beans, carrots, green salad
- Tuna pasta salad, orange
- Halloumi cheese sandwich, watermelon

Snack
- Carrot sticks and lettuce heart
- A handful of nuts
- Rice pudding
Food Groups

Healthy Protein
- Good sources of protein are chicken, turkey, fish, lean meat, low fat dairy products, eggs, dry beans, nuts, and peanut butter.
- Fish- Eat about 170 grams, twice a week from a variety of fish and shellfish that are low in mercury like canned light tuna, shrimps or salmon*.

* [www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov) offers additional information on mercury and fish

Healthy Fats
- Pregnant women need healthy fats for baby’s development
- Eat healthy fats throughout the day such as fats found in olive and canola oil, fatty fish (salmon, herring and sardines), avocados, peanut butter, nuts and seeds
- Avoid trans fat or foods with “hydrogenated or partially hydrogenated fat” like many packaged and processed foods, fried and fast foods
- Limit saturated fat (like butter, ghee, whole milk dairy products, high fat meats like lamb meat and sausages)

Healthy Carbohydrates
- Fruits and vegetables are healthy sources of carbohydrates. Eat them often and throughout the day. Try at least five servings per day. Eat dark and brightly colored fruits and vegetables because they are richer sources of vitamins and minerals. Choose whole fruit rather than juice whenever possible. Frozen and canned fruits and vegetables are acceptable. However, canned fruits in syrup are higher in sugar and canned vegetables are higher in salt.
- Eat whole grain products including whole wheat bread, brown rice, whole grain pasta, burgul, wholegrain breakfast cereal. Limit simple sugars and refined carbohydrates (cookies, soft drinks, sweets…)

Fluids
- Drink enough water to never feel thirsty and so urine is light in color
- Choose pasteurized low fat milk instead of juices and sweetened beverages, which are high in calories
- Aim for 2-3 glasses of milk per day
Food Safety and Preparation

- When you are pregnant, you are at an increased risk for food borne illness because hormonal changes during pregnancy weaken your immune system.

- Remember to:
  - Wash your hands before and after food preparation.
  - Cook well and properly handle meat, fish, eggs and poultry. Eggs should be cooked until firm.
  - Wash fruits and vegetables well.

- Avoid:
  - Any non-packaged or unprocessed milk, yogurt, cheese, karisheh, etc.
  - Unpasteurized brie, feta, camembert, blue cheese and all soft cheeses.
  - Shark, swordfish, king mackerel, tilefish and solid white albacore tuna because they contain mercury.
  - Unpasteurized milk and juice.
  - Cold cuts (unless reheated to steaming hot).
  - Cooked foods and foods requiring refrigeration that have been left unrefrigerated for more than 2 hours.

Nausea and Vomiting

To help cope with nausea and vomiting you can:
- Avoid having an empty stomach.
- Eat whatever food appeals to you in frequent small amounts, until feeling better.
- Get out of bed slowly and eat soon afterward.
- Drink fluids between meals, and not with meals.
- Choose cold foods (with less smell) or get someone else to do the cooking if possible.
- Get plenty of fresh air.
- Try smelling fresh cut lemons.
- Avoid smoke, strong odors, and caffeine.

Heartburn

Common during pregnancy. It is caused by the pressure of the growing baby and hormone changes during pregnancy that allow stomach acid to move up to your throat. The following suggestions might help:
- Do not lie down after eating.
- When you lie down, raise your head and shoulders.
- Avoid fried or greasy foods.
- Drink fluids between meals, not with meals.
Avoid coffee, colas, chocolate and smoking
Eat slowly. Take the time to chew well
Eat small meals and snacks

**Dining out**

Eating out can be challenging especially when you are trying to eat healthy. Portion control is key since the servings at most restaurants are often 2 to 3 times larger than at home. Take a look at our portion guide

---

**Estimating Portion Sizes**

- **FIST** = 1 CUP
  (1 serving of cereal)
- **HANDFUL** = 1 OR 2 OZ.
  (1 serving of nuts)
- **PALM** = 3 OZ.
  (1 serving of meat or fish)
- **THUMB** = 1 OZ
  (1 serving cheese)
- **THUMB TIP** = 1 TSP
  (1 serving mayonnaise)

---

When eating out

- Choose lean meats that are baked, broiled or grilled
- Include vegetables and whole grain starch like brown rice or whole wheat pasta
- Enjoy a fresh fruit cup for dessert
- Limit foods that are fried and prepared in butter or creamy white sauces

**Sample Healthy Meals Out**

- Grilled chicken on salad greens with dressing on the side
- Grilled steak with baked potato and salad with balsamic dressing
- Shrimp fajita
- Pasta with Bolognese sauce
Frequently Asked Questions

Can I get enough calcium if I don’t drink milk?

Yes. Yogurt has exactly the same amount of calcium. You can also choose cheeses and fortified soy milk.

Are artificial sweeteners safe to use while I am pregnant?

Yes, in moderation.

I am vegetarian. Do I have to eat meat?

There are many alternatives to meat such as dairy products, dry beans and nuts. Consult your dietitian.

How can I reduce my constipation?

Drink 8 glasses of water per day. Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables (with peels). Include whole grains in your meal plan. Be active every day.

Can I have caffeine?

Yes, in moderation

Is it true that I can’t have alcohol?

There is no safe amount or safe time to drink alcohol during pregnancy. No one knows how much alcohol it takes to harm a developing baby.

How are my nutrition needs different if I am pregnant with twins?

You should eat a meal or snack every 2 hours while awake and consult your dietitian about your individual needs.

Can I eat spicy foods?

Yes, if it is comfortable for you.

Is it necessary to take a vitamin/mineral supplement?

Though it is possible to meet the requirements for most nutrients through a balanced diet, some doctors recommend a daily supplement as a safeguard. Supplementation usually includes iron, folic acid and calcium. Discuss your needs with your physician.