

Nutrition and Food Safety During Pregnancy

This chapter is about eating safely to help you and your growing baby stay healthy. If you have questions about your diet or nutrition during your pregnancy, talk with your healthcare provider or ask to talk with a registered dietitian.

Weight Gain

- Weight gain in the 1st trimester is small (1 to 4 pounds).
- An average weight gain of 25 to 35 pounds by the end of pregnancy is best for producing a healthy baby.
- If you were underweight or overweight before getting pregnant, your healthcare provider may suggest a different weight-gain range for you.

To learn more about weight gain during pregnancy, please see the “Resources” section at the end of this chapter.

Nutrition

Your baby needs proper nutrition to develop and grow. To support a healthy pregnancy:

- Eat healthy foods during your entire pregnancy. Include fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, legumes, nuts, nut butters, low-fat dairy products, and a small amount of healthy fats such as olive oil and avocado. Limit juice and soda.
- Take your prenatal vitamins. Talk with your provider if you are having any trouble taking your vitamins.



Eating a well-balanced diet while you are pregnant is vital for your health and your baby's health. To learn more, visit www.choosemyplate.gov.

- Drink 8 to 12 glasses (8 ounces each) of water every day.
- Limit caffeine to 150 mg per day. This is about 1 cup (8 ounces) of coffee. Check the label on soft drinks and energy drinks.

If you have concerns or questions about what to eat or not eat, talk with your healthcare provider. You can also ask to meet with a dietitian.

Important Nutrients

These key nutrients are very important during pregnancy:

Protein

Most pregnant women need 8 to 9 ounces (65 grams) or more of protein daily. Have 2 to 3 servings daily (2 to 3 ounces per serving) of meat, fish, poultry, eggs, soy, cooked tofu, peanut butter, dairy foods, and legumes. Remember to cook meats well (see “Foods to Avoid” on pages 17 and 18).

Calcium

Calcium is used during pregnancy for bone health and other vital functions. The foods that are highest in calcium are milk, cheese, yogurt, cottage cheese, and soy milk that has calcium added. Other foods such as broccoli, kale, seafood, tofu, sesame seeds, blackstrap molasses, white beans, fortified rice milk, and almonds provide calcium in much smaller amounts.

If you cannot eat at least 4 servings daily of high-calcium foods, talk with your provider about whether you need a calcium supplement. You need about 1,200 to 1,500 mg of calcium daily.

Iron

Iron is needed for healthy blood and to carry oxygen to your cells. You and your growing baby need a lot of iron. As your body expands during pregnancy, the amount of blood in your body increases by about 50%.

Your baby needs iron for his blood, too. Babies need to store up enough iron to last for 6 months after birth. You can get iron by eating red meats, poultry, fish, eggs, blackstrap molasses, enriched breads and cereals, dried fruit, beans, and some leafy greens. You need about 30 mg of iron a day during pregnancy. Your provider will check your iron level through blood tests and recommend an iron supplement if needed.



Your healthy food choices during pregnancy help your baby develop and grow.

Tips:

- Iron and calcium “compete” for absorption. This means it is best **not** to eat foods that contain both of them at the same time. Take your calcium and iron supplements about 1½ hours apart so that your body absorbs them best.
- Vitamin C helps your body absorb iron. Have 4 ounces of juice or fruit that is high in vitamin C with your iron.

Folic Acid

Folic acid is needed to make new blood cells and to keep blood cells healthy. Growing babies use folic acid to make their blood, nervous system, and other vital organs. Foods that are rich in folic acid are dark green vegetables, legumes, whole grains, orange juice, and peanuts. Eat foods that have high amounts of folic acid in addition to taking your prenatal vitamin.

Foods to Avoid

Alcohol

- Alcohol passes through the placenta to the baby.
- A mother who drinks alcohol is at risk for having a baby with fetal alcohol syndrome or fetal alcohol effects, which may include mental retardation.
- Pregnancy is the time to stop drinking alcohol. Ask your healthcare provider for help.

Risks from Food During Pregnancy

There are 3 specific risks from food that can cause serious illness and death to you or your unborn child: *listeria*, *methylmercury*, and *biotoxins*.

Listeria

Listeria are harmful bacteria that can grow in your refrigerator at temperatures most other bacteria in food cannot. It causes an illness called *listeriosis*. It can be present in cold, ready-to-eat foods and unpasteurized milk and milk products.

To avoid listeria:

- Do **not** eat hot dogs or luncheon meats unless they are reheated until they are steaming hot.

- Do **not** eat soft, “raw,” or unpasteurized cheeses. Some of these are feta, Brie, Camembert, blue-veined cheeses, and Mexican-style cheeses such as queso fresco, queso blanco, panela, and others – unless the label says they are made with pasteurized milk. Check the label.
- Do **not** eat refrigerated pates or meat spreads.
- Do **not** eat raw or undercooked fish such as sushi, seared tuna, raw oysters, and ceviche.
- Do **not** eat refrigerated smoked seafood **unless** it is in a **cooked** dish such as a casserole. (Refrigerated smoked seafood such as salmon, trout, whitefish, cod, tuna, or mackerel is most often labeled as “nova-style,” “lox,” “kippered,” “smoked,” or “jerky.”)
- Do **not** drink raw (unpasteurized) milk or eat foods that contain unpasteurized milk.



To find out what fish are safe for pregnant women to eat, check the “Healthy Fish Guide” at www.doh.wa.gov/fish.

Methylmercury in Fish

Methylmercury is a metal that can be found in certain fish. At high levels, it can be harmful to an unborn baby’s or young child’s developing nervous system.

- It is safe to eat up to 12 ounces a week of fish and shellfish that are low in mercury. These include shrimp, light canned tuna, salmon, pollock, and catfish.
- Do not eat large fish that live a long time, such as shark, tilefish, king mackerel, and swordfish.
- For more information, ask your healthcare provider for the “Healthy Fish Guide,” or visit www.doh.wa.gov/fish.

Biotoxins in Shellfish

Before eating fish, crab, lobster, or other shellfish, check to make sure the waters it came from are safe. Eating contaminated shellfish can cause serious illness or death. To learn more:

- Visit www.doh.wa.gov/shellfishsafety.htm.
- Or, call the Shellfish Safety Hotline at 800.562.5632.

Toxoplasma

Toxoplasma is a harmful parasite. It causes an illness called *toxoplasmosis*, which can be hard to detect. It can be found in raw and undercooked meat, unwashed fruits and vegetables, soil, dirty cat litter boxes, and outdoor places where cat feces can be found.

- If you have a cat, have someone else change the litter box. If you have to clean it, wash your hands with soap and warm water afterward.
- Wear gloves if you garden or handle sand from a sandbox.
- Do not get a new cat while you are pregnant.
- Cook meat well and to the right temperature.

Resources

This chapter is a short guide to nutrition and food safety during pregnancy. To learn more, please see:

- U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) website for information about a healthy diet during pregnancy: www.choosemyplate.gov
- The Institute of Medicine website for weight gain recommendations: www.iom.edu/Reports/2009/Weight-Gain-During-Pregnancy-Reexamining-the-Guidelines.aspx
- “Food Safety for Moms-to-Be” on the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) website: www.fda.gov/food/resourcesforyou/healtheducators/ucm081785.htm
- “Healthy Fish Guide” on the Washington State Department of Health website: www.doh.wa.gov/fish
- The book *Pregnancy, Childbirth and the Newborn*, by Simkin, Whalley and Keppler

Questions?

Your questions are important. If you have questions about nutrition or risks from food during pregnancy, talk with your healthcare provider.

