

A guide for parents

Nutrition during pregnancy

A healthy diet during pregnancy - things to remember:

- Eat breakfast
- **Base meals on starchy foods** such as potatoes, bread, rice and pasta, choosing wholegrain where possible
- **Eat fibre-rich foods** such as oats, beans, lentils, seeds, fruit and vegetables, as well as wholegrain bread, brown rice and pasta
- **Eat at least five portions** of a variety of fruit and vegetables each day - it's worth choosing organic if possible
- **Limit intake of fried foods**, drinks and confectionery high in added sugars (such as cakes, pastries and fizzy drinks), and other foods high in fat and sugar (such as some take-away and fast foods)
- **Make sure the diet contains enough calcium** – the best sources are dairy foods such as cheese, yogurt and milk, but other useful sources include tofu, tinned sardines (including the bones), baked beans and chickpeas, green vegetables such as spinach, broccoli, cabbage
- **Iron-containing foods** in the diet will help prevent anaemia. Good sources include red meat, poultry, fish, beans and pulses, seeds, green leafy vegetables, dried apricots, fortified breakfast cereals and wholegrain bread. Fruit juice or other food high in vitamin C consumed at the same time as iron-containing vegetable sources will help the body to absorb iron better
- **There's no need to 'eat for two'** – it's only during the last three months of pregnancy that extra calories are needed, and then it is only an extra 200 kcal per day.



Important nutrients where additional supplements are also necessary:

Folate - a supplement containing 400µg should ideally be taken preconceptually and then until the 12th week of pregnancy to reduce the risk of neural tube defects. Additionally, 100µg should be consumed from food sources:

- 30g serving fortified breakfast cereal (average) = 75µg folic acid
- Wholemeal bread, 2 slices from a large loaf = 30µg folic acid
- White bread, 2 slices from a large loaf = 20µg folic acid
- 100g serving of broccoli = 65µg folic acid
- 100g serving of spinach = 80µg folic acid
- 175g serving of boiled potatoes = 35µg folic acid
- 1 glass of orange juice (170ml) = 30µg folic acid
- 200g serving of baked beans = 45µg folic acid

Vitamin D - this is an important vitamin required to ensure good bone health. Useful sources of vitamin D include oily fish such as salmon, fresh tuna, mackerel and sardines; fortified breakfast cereals; eggs; fortified margarines. The Department of Health recommends that all pregnant and breastfeeding women take a supplement of 10µg (400 IU) vitamin D per day.

Foods to avoid during pregnancy

- **Peanuts** If you are allergic to peanuts, or are advised to avoid them by a health professional, they should be excluded from your diet. Otherwise you can include peanuts (or foods containing peanuts) in your diet during pregnancy and whilst breastfeeding.
- **Alcohol** The NHS recommends that pregnant women should avoid drinking alcohol. If they choose to drink, to minimise risk to the baby, they should not drink more than one or two units of alcohol once or twice a week and should not get drunk. (A small 125ml glass of wine = 1½ units of alcohol; a larger 175ml glass = 2 units. A half pint of ordinary strength beer or lager = 1 unit.) NICE advises women to avoid drinking in the first three months of pregnancy especially because of the increased risk of miscarriage.
- **Caffeine** This should be limited to a total of no more than 200mg caffeine per day.

Recommended limits per day for pregnant women:

- 2 mugs of instant coffee (100mg each)
- 1 mug of filter coffee (140mg each)
- 2 mugs of tea (75mg each)
- 5 cans of cola (up to 40mg each)
- 2 cans of 'energy' drink (up to 80mg each)
- 4 (50g) bars of plain chocolate (up to 50 mg caffeine each)

Other foods to avoid are:

- Raw meat / raw fish e.g. Sushi
- Liver
- Fish containing high levels of mercury - shark, marlin and swordfish. Also, limit oily fish to two portions per week, and cans of tuna to 4 medium-sized cans per week
- Raw or undercooked eggs and foods made from it e.g. home-made mayonnaise
- Soft or unpasteurised cheeses

Weight gain during pregnancy

The amount of weight a mum gains in pregnancy can vary a great deal. Recommended weight gain during pregnancy is generally considered to be around 8-14 kilograms (17.5-30lb), although this will depend on mum's weight at the start. Excessive weight gain in pregnancy is associated with increased pregnancy complications (e.g. pre-eclampsia, diabetes, high blood pressure) and adverse outcomes for both mothers and babies, and is a major risk factor for childhood obesity.

If a mum-to-be is overweight or obese, it makes sense for her to try to lose some weight before conceiving. If a woman is already pregnant and is overweight or obese, then dieting during pregnancy is not recommended and may harm the unborn child. She should manage any weight gain carefully by following a healthy diet and limiting calorie intake to a sensible level.



**For healthcare professional use.
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