

# Nutrition in Pregnancy

When you are pregnant, you have special nutritional needs. What you eat affects your baby's development and can affect your baby throughout his or her entire life. Making good food choices during pregnancy will help you and your baby stay healthy.

## Nutritional needs

MyPyramid.gov is a good source of nutrition information. There is a special section devoted to pregnancy and breastfeeding. You can get a personalized plan by logging into MyPyramid Plan for Moms. Your nutritional needs will change as the pregnancy progresses.

## Weight Gain

The total amount of weight you should gain depends on your body mass index (BMI) when you became pregnant. Your BMI is calculated based on your height and weight. You can calculate your BMI by using the chart on page 134.

Women who were at a healthy weight before becoming pregnant should gain between 25 and 35 pounds while pregnant. The recommended weight gain is different for those who were overweight or underweight before becoming pregnant and for women carrying more than one baby. If you are pregnant with one baby, the table below will help you determine your recommended weight gain based on your BMI.

Calculated BMI	BMI Categories	Weight Gain Guidelines
<18.5	Underweight	Gain 28 - 40 pounds
18.5 - 24.9	Normal weight	Gain 25 - 35 pounds
25 - 29.9	Overweight	Gain 15 - 25 pounds
30 or greater	Obesity	Gain 11 - 15 pounds

At each visit you will be weighed. You can keep track of your weight gain on the table on page 135. If you are gaining weight too fast, you may need to cut back on the calories you are currently eating. If you are not gaining weight, or gaining too slowly, you may need to eat more calories. However, normal women do gain weight in different patterns and don't always follow the average pattern.

If you are gaining weight too slow, the best way you can take in more calories is to eat a little more from each food group.

If you seem to be gaining weight too fast, the best way to eat fewer calories is to decrease the amount of "extras" you are eating. Another good way is to increase the amount of vegetables you are eating. Vegetables are full of good nutrients and can help you feel full but have fewer calories than many foods.

## Ways to avoid excessive weight gain

- Limit juice to two, four ounce servings per day.
- You're not "eating for two." At four months, add an extra 300 calories per day. Examples of 300 calories include a sandwich with two ounces of meat or a small peanut butter and jelly sandwich or two, eight ounce glasses of milk.
- Make healthy choices when dining out. A typical fast food meal has about 1,500 calories, which is almost a full day's worth of calories!
- Limit fried foods and high fat meats such as ribs and sausage. Choose lean cuts of meat such as "loin" cuts and trim visible fat.
- Use mayonnaise, salad dressings, and oils sparingly.
- Portion control is one of the easiest ways to reduce unnecessary calories.
- Remember to exercise. Walking and being active in your daily routine counts!
- Make an appointment with a dietitian to address your individual needs.

## What are "extras"?

Extras are added sugars and solid fats in foods. Some examples of foods with "extras" are the following:

Soft drinks	Candies	Desserts	Sweetened cereals
Fried foods	Cheese	Whole milk	Sweetened yogurt
Sausages	Fatty meats	Biscuits	

## Look for choices that are low-fat, fat-free, unsweetened, or with no added sugars such as

Whole fruits	Skim milk	Low-fat yogurt	Unsweetened cereal
Eggs	Vegetables	Wheat crackers	

## Intentional Weight loss

Losing weight intentionally (on purpose) is not recommended during pregnancy. Weight loss can cause low birth weight and other abnormalities. A small amount of weight loss is okay if you began your pregnancy overweight or obese and are now eating a healthy more balanced diet. Some women do lose weight in the beginning of their pregnancies due to nausea and vomiting. Usually this is temporary and not harmful to the woman or her baby. If you are losing weight, please talk with your healthcare provider.

## Dietary Supplements

During pregnancy, your needs increase for several vitamins and minerals. You need enough for your growing baby's needs as well as your own needs. This makes it difficult to get all that you need from food. This is especially true for **follic acid** and **iron**. During pregnancy, mothers need to consume enough nutrients to meet their increased needs as well as those of their growing baby.

## Food Guide Pyramid: A Guide to Healthier Eating

When you are pregnant, you have special nutritional needs. Follow the MyPyramid Plan below to help you and your baby stay healthy. The plan shows different amounts of food for different trimesters, to meet your changing nutritional needs.

Food Group	1st Trimester	2nd & 3rd Trimester	What counts as 1 cup or 1 ounce?	Remember to. . .
<b>Eat the amount indicated below from each group daily *</b>				
Fruits	2 cups	2 cups	1 cup fruit or juice 1/2 cup dried fruit	<b><i>Focus on fruits</i></b>  Eat a variety of fruits
Vegetables	2 1/2 cups	3 cups	1 cup raw or cooked vegetables or juice  2 cups raw leafy vegetables	<b><i>Vary your veggies</i></b>  Eat more dark-green and orange vegetables and cooked dry beans
Grains	6 ounces	8 ounces	1 slice bread 1 ounce ready-to-eat cereal 1/2 cup cooked pasta, rice or cereal	<b><i>Make half your grains whole</i></b>  Choose whole instead of refined grains
Meats & Beans	5 1/2 ounces	6 1/2 ounces	1 ounce lean meat, poultry or fish 1/4 cup cooked dry beans 1/2 ounce nuts or 1 egg 1 tablespoon peanut butter	<b><i>Go lean with protein</i></b>  Choose low-fat or lean meats and poultry
Milk	3 cups	3 cups	1 cup milk 8 ounces yogurt 1 1/2 ounces cheese 2 ounces processed cheese	<b><i>Get your calcium-rich foods</i></b>  Go low-fat or fat-free when choosing milk, yogurt and cheese

**\* These amounts are for an average pregnant woman. You may need more or less than the average. Check with your doctor to make sure you are gaining weight as you should.**

**Folic Acid:** Folic acid is a B vitamin that helps prevent serious birth defects of a baby's brain or spine. These are called neural tube defects. Getting enough folic acid can also help prevent birth defects like cleft lip and congenital heart disease. These birth defects often happen before most women know they are pregnant. Most prenatal supplements contain 600 micrograms per day of folic acid or more. This is the amount recommended for pregnant women.

**Iron:** Pregnant women need extra iron for the increasing amount of blood in their bodies. Iron helps keep your blood healthy and able to carry oxygen to your cells. Plus, your baby needs to store iron in his or her body to last through the first few months of life. Too little iron can cause a condition called anemia. If you have anemia, you might look pale or notice paleness under your nails, and feel very tired. Your health care provider checks for anemia with blood tests during your pregnancy. Most prenatal supplements contain 27 milligrams per day of iron. This is the amount recommended for pregnant women.

**Omega-3 Fatty Acids:** For pregnant and nursing women, omega-3 fatty acids, particularly DHA, are important for the health of mom and baby. DHA is the most common omega-3 in the brain and eyes. Getting plenty will help to support a baby's brain and eye development and function. Women should get at least 200 milligrams of DHA every day.

DHA and other omega-3 fatty acids can be found in fatty fish, algae oil and fish oil. Pregnant moms need to be careful about the kinds of fish they eat (see section on page 131 on eating fish during pregnancy).

Flaxseed is a source of omega-3 fatty acids. Some animal studies have shown that flaxseed can be harmful during pregnancy. Little research has been done in humans. But because we know so little, it's wise to avoid flaxseed if you are pregnant or breastfeeding.

If you are not getting enough DHA from food, another option is to take a supplement containing at least 200 milligrams of DHA. Several prenatal supplements include DHA, either from fish oil or other sources. As with all supplements, talk to your healthcare provider beforehand to make sure this choice is right for you.

### **Take a prenatal vitamin instead of individual vitamins or minerals:**

This ensures that you and your baby get balanced amounts of the vitamins and minerals you need. A high dose of some nutrients, in particular vitamin A, can be harmful to your baby. Too much vitamin A can cause birth defects.

### **Do not take dietary supplements or herbal products on your own:**

Scientists have not determined the risks to your baby from taking most herbal or botanical supplements. For this reason, avoid them when you are pregnant or breastfeeding. Not all “natural” products are safe. In fact many poisons are natural. These supplements are not tested or regulated like other drugs and medicines. You should avoid taking these substances without first talking with your healthcare provider.

### **Taking too much of a dietary supplement can have harmful effects:**

Take supplements or herbal products only if approved by your healthcare provider. Some dietary supplements can interact with prescribed medications or may not be safe for your baby. To avoid the possibility of harmful effects, discuss any supplement or medication you are taking or considering with your provider.

## **Food Safety**

When you are pregnant, your ability to fight off infections you can get from food is decreased. In addition, your unborn baby’s immune system is not fully developed. This means both you and your baby have a greater chance of getting sick from eating unsafe food. Eating unsafe food can cause foodborne illness.

If you get a foodborne illness, the effects may be worse than if you were not pregnant. Some foodborne illnesses can cause a woman to have a miscarriage or premature delivery, or cause the baby to die. They may also result in serious health problems for the baby after birth.

To protect your health and your baby’s health, you need to be especially careful about food safety while you are pregnant.

**Food safety advice for everyone:** Keep food safe to eat by following these general guidelines to avoid food borne illness. Practice the following when preparing food:

- **Clean:** Wash hands and surfaces often
- **Separate:** Don’t cross-contaminate
- **Cook:** Cook to proper temperature
- **Chill:** Refrigerate promptly

**Keeping food safe from toxoplasmosis:** Toxoplasmosis is an infection caused by a parasite. For most people, the body's immune system usually keeps the parasite from causing illness. However, if you become infected while pregnant, you can pass an infection to your unborn child, even if you are not ill. The best way to protect your unborn child is by protecting yourself against toxoplasmosis.

Follow this advice to prevent toxoplasmosis:

- Wash your hands with soap and water after touching soil, sand, raw meat, or unwashed vegetables.
- Cook your meat completely. The internal temperature of the meat should reach 160°F. Chicken and turkey need to be cooked to a higher temperature. Do not sample meat until it is cooked.
- Freeze meat for several days before cooking to greatly reduce the chance of infection.
- Wash all cutting boards and knives with hot soapy water after each use.
- Wash and/or peel all fruits and vegetables before eating them.
- Cats can spread this parasite. Have someone else change the litter box if possible. If you have to change it, wear disposable gloves and wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water afterwards.
- Wear gloves when gardening or handling sandbox material. Cats may use gardens or sandboxes as litter boxes. Wash hands afterward.
- Avoid drinking untreated water, particularly when traveling in less developed countries.

**Keeping food safe from listeriosis:** Listeriosis is an infection caused by a bacteria. In pregnancy, it can cause miscarriage, serious illness, preterm delivery, or serious illness or death of a newborn baby. To decrease your risk of listeriosis, do the following:

- Keep your refrigerator at 40°F or slightly lower. Keep your freezer at 0°F or lower.
- Clean up all spills in your refrigerator right away - especially juices from uncooked meat.
- Wash your hands after handling raw meat or seafood or its juices.
- Do not eat hot dogs, lunch meats, or meats from a deli unless they are reheated to steaming hot.
- Do not eat meat spreads, pate, or smoked seafood from a store deli or meat counter. Canned foods such as tuna, salmon, or packaged pasteurized deli-type meats are all right to eat. Refrigerate contents after opening.
- Do not drink raw milk or eat foods made of unpasteurized milk.
- Do not eat salads made in a store
- Do not eat soft cheeses such as feta, queso blanco, queso fresco, brie, camembert, blue-veined cheeses, or panela unless it's labeled **MADE WITH PASTEURIZED MILK**.

## Eating Fish While Pregnant or Breastfeeding

Fish provide important nutrients, including omega-3 fatty acids, which are good for your health. Omega-3 fatty acids are critical for the development of the baby. Fish can be part of a healthy diet for pregnant and breastfeeding women. However, some types of fish may contain chemicals that can be health risks.

One of these chemicals is **mercury**. Some types of fish have high levels of mercury. It can harm the developing nervous system in an unborn child or baby. See information below about which fish are safe versus not safe to eat. Choose fish carefully to prevent any harm to your baby while still enjoying the health benefits of eating seafood. Do not eat shark, swordfish, king mackerel, or tilefish because they contain high levels of mercury.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) suggests you may eat up to 12 ounces a week (two average meals) of a variety of fish and shellfish that are low in mercury. However, many experts strongly believe the FDA limits are too restrictive. The FDA limitations did not take into account all of the benefits of fish to pregnant women and their babies. Eat plenty of fish but choose those lowest in mercury. As a rule, the benefits of eating fish outweigh the risks, especially during pregnancy. Eat smaller fish and cook and handle fish carefully.

- Shrimp, canned light tuna, salmon, pollock, and catfish are some commonly eaten fish that are low in mercury. To check on mercury in other types of fish, go to [mypyramid.gov](http://mypyramid.gov) or the EPA web site
- “White” tuna (albacore) has more mercury than canned light tuna. When choosing fish and shellfish, include only up to 6 ounces per week of white tuna.

**Other chemicals in fish:** In addition to mercury, fish may contain other harmful chemicals, especially fish caught in local waters. Check local advisories to learn about the safety of fish caught in your local lakes, rivers, and coastal areas. Advisories may recommend that people limit or avoid eating some types of fish caught in certain places. If no advice is available, you may eat up to six ounces per week of fish from local waters, but don’t eat any other fish during that week.

## Alcohol

Drinking alcohol while you are pregnant can cause your baby to be born with both physical and mental birth defects. The most serious concern is a condition called fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS). FAS is one of the most common causes of mental retardation.

No one knows exactly how much alcohol a woman has to drink to cause birth defects in her baby. That level may differ from woman to woman. So experts agree that the best thing to do is not to drink alcohol at all while you are pregnant - that includes beer, wine, wine coolers and liquor.

If a woman takes an occasional drink before she knows she is pregnant, it probably won't harm her baby. But she should stop drinking alcohol as soon as she thinks she may be pregnant.

No amount of alcohol is safe when you are pregnant. If you find it hard to say no, avoid parties, bars, and other places where people are drinking alcohol. If you have a problem stopping alcohol use, get help. Start by talking with your provider or someone you trust. There is no more important time to stop than when you are pregnant.

### **Food Items to Limit**

**Caffeine:** Among experts there is no strong agreement regarding how much caffeine is safe during pregnancy. Most sources recommend that pregnant women limit their caffeine intake to less than 200 milligrams per day. This is the amount of caffeine in one cup of coffee. Of course, the amount of caffeine in a cup of coffee will vary depending on how it was made. Also, pregnant women should be aware that there is some caffeine in tea, chocolate, and soft drinks. Even energy drinks and non-prescription medications may have some caffeine in them.

Compared to drinking beverages high in caffeine, it is better for you and baby if you drink water, milk, and small amounts of fruit juice during pregnancy. You may drink decaffeinated soft drinks, coffee and tea but be aware that these may contain a small amount of caffeine. Caffeine does damage the DNA so its use should be limited whether or not you are pregnant.

**Juice:** Fruit juices are high in calories. Limit juice intake to four ounces per day. A better choice would be to eat the whole, fresh fruit.

**Fats:** Be mindful about the amount of fat you eat. Fried foods and fast foods are high in fat (and calories). Some forms of fat are worse for your health. "Trans fats" found in many processed foods are particularly harmful. When choosing cooking oils, olive and canola oils are much better for you and the baby than regular vegetable oil (soy), margarine, or shortening. Limit the amount of fast food you consume to no more than one meal per week.

**Sugar:** Excess sugar is not good for you or your baby. It can lead to problems with your teeth and excessive weight gain. Sugar substitutes may be used in moderation.

**Herbs:** Overall, scientific evidence is lacking about the safety of various herbs in pregnancy. Some "safe" herbal teas include: blackberry, citrus peel, ginger, lemon balm, and rose hip.

