

# What You Should Know About Nutrition During Pregnancy

**G**ood nutrition is the key to a successful pregnancy for both mother and child. Eating well during pregnancy can also contribute to the development of wholesome eating habits for the growing child.

## DAILY FOOD CHOICES

A well-balanced diet includes foods from the groups listed below. These choices will provide most pregnant women with the essential nutrients they need each day.

**Protein-rich Foods (3 to 4 servings per day).**—Protein is vital to fetal growth and development. Protein-rich foods such as the following also contain necessary vitamins and minerals including B vitamins, iron, and zinc:

- Beef, lamb, pork, veal (2 to 3 oz)
- Chicken, turkey (2 to 3 oz)
- Fish, seafood (2 to 3 oz)
- Eggs (2), egg substitute (½ C)
- Cooked dried beans, peas, lentils (1 C)
- Nuts (½ C), seeds (¼ C)
- Peanut butter (2 T)
- Tofu (4 oz or ½ C)

**Grains (7 or more servings per day).**—Grains such as the following provide carbohydrates for energy, B vitamins, fiber, and minerals including zinc and magnesium:

- Bagel, bun, English muffin, pita (½)
- Bread (1 slice); tortilla (1)
- Cereal (½ C cooked, ¾ C ready-to-eat)
- Crackers (4 to 5)
- Muffin, roll, biscuit, dumpling (1 small)
- Pancake, waffle (1)
- Pasta, rice, couscous, barley (½ C cooked)
- Wheat germ (¼ C)

**Calcium-rich Foods (3 to 4 servings per day).**—Foods such as the following contain many vitamins and minerals including calcium

and vitamin D, which help the baby's bones develop properly:

- Milk, buttermilk, calcium-fortified soy milk (1 C)
- Cheese (1½ oz)
- Evaporated milk (½ C)
- Ice cream, ice milk (1½ C)
- Milk shake (1 C)
- Nonfat dry milk powder (⅓ C)
- Pudding or custard (1 C)
- Yogurt, frozen yogurt (1 C)

**Vitamin C-rich Foods (1 or more servings per day).**—Vitamin C has many functions including helping the body use iron to make red blood cells. It is found in most fruits and vegetables such as:

- Cantaloupe, honeydew
- Guava, kiwi, mango, papaya
- Orange, tangerine, grapefruit
- Strawberries
- Orange juice, grapefruit juice, enriched juice
- Broccoli, cauliflower, kale, cabbage, mustard greens
- Green, red, or chili peppers
- Baked white or sweet potato
- Tomato

**Dark Green Vegetables (1 or more servings per day).**—The following vegetables are excellent sources of folic acid, known to prevent certain birth defects:

- Asparagus
- Broccoli
- Brussels sprouts
- Green peas
- Spinach
- Turnip
- Collard greens
- Dark, leafy lettuce

**Other Fruits and Vegetables (2 or more servings per day).**—Fruits and vegetables provide vitamin A, vitamin E, other nutrients, and fiber. Choose a variety of colorful foods from this group and note that:

- A serving of fruit is one medium piece, ½ C cooked or canned, ¼ C dried, or ½ C pure fruit juice.

*Important nutrition components of a healthy pregnancy include a well-balanced diet, proper weight gain, safe and appropriate use of supplements, avoidance of alcohol, and safe food handling.*



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- A serving of vegetables is one medium piece, ½ C cooked, 1 C raw, ½ C tomato sauce or juice.

**Fats (3 or more servings per day).**—Fats contain essential nutrients such as vitamin E. Some examples of fat-containing foods are:

- Avocado (1/8)
- Cream cheese (1 T)
- Margarine, mayonnaise, butter (1 tsp)
- Olives (5)
- Oil (1 tsp)
- Salad dressing (1 T)
- Sour cream (1 T)
- Nuts and seeds (¼ C)

**Fluids (8 or more 8-oz servings per day).**—It is important to ensure adequate fluid intake during pregnancy by drinking healthy beverages such as:

- Water
- Real fruit or vegetable juice
- Soup
- Milk

Pregnant women need not completely avoid other foods, such as sweets. Because these foods have less nutritional value, however, they should be eaten in moderation. Artificial sweeteners are acceptable during pregnancy as they have not been shown to harm the fetus. Weight loss or restrictive diets are never advisable during pregnancy.

### Vitamin/Mineral Supplements

Most health care providers suggest women take a prenatal supplement during pregnancy. In some cases, a woman's diet may not include enough of a certain nutrient such as iron or calcium and additional supplements may be necessary. Women who follow vegan diets usually require vitamin B<sub>12</sub>, vitamin D, and zinc.

Some dietary supplements are not safe during pregnancy. All pregnant women should discuss the use of nutritional supplements with their health care providers.

### Resources

- **The March of Dimes Pregnancy & Newborn Health Education Center**  
<http://www.marchofdimes.com>
- **WebMD, Your Guide to Pregnancy: Eating Right**  
[www.webmd.com/solutions/sc/nutrition-for-two/eating-right](http://www.webmd.com/solutions/sc/nutrition-for-two/eating-right)

## Weight Gain During Pregnancy

Weight Range of Mother Before Pregnancy	Recommended Weight Gain
Normal weight	25 to 35 lb
Below normal weight	28 to 40 lb
Overweight	15 to 25 lb
Twins	40 to 45 lb
Triplets	50 to 60 lb

## SPECIAL CONCERNS

### Alcohol

Pregnant women should avoid alcoholic beverages. Alcohol has been linked to mental retardation, learning disabilities, and birth defects.

### Caffeine

Studies have not shown that caffeine causes birth defects, but excessive amounts may increase the chances of low birth weight babies. Also, caffeine can be passed into the breast milk of lactating mothers. It is advisable to moderate intake of caffeinated products such as coffee, tea, and some soft drinks.

### Food Safety

Pregnant women may be more susceptible to certain food-borne illnesses. Therefore, it is best to avoid raw or undercooked meat, poultry, eggs, and seafood. Also, swordfish, king mackerel, tilefish, and shark may contain toxic contaminants and should be avoided. Washing hands and cooking surfaces, refrigerating foods promptly, and cooking foods completely ensures further food safety.

### Conclusion

Pregnancy is an especially important time in a woman's life to focus on proper health care and nutrition. The information provided in this handout is a good place to start. Women with special health problems or those who need help implementing a healthy diet should consult a professional nutritionist.

*This Patient Handout was prepared by Lynn Danford, MS, LD, using materials from the March of Dimes Pregnancy & Newborn Health Education Center 2006, <http://www.marchofdimes.com>, and WebMD, [www.webmd.com/solutions/sc/nutrition-for-two/eating-right](http://www.webmd.com/solutions/sc/nutrition-for-two/eating-right).*