

Department of Nutrition and Dietetics

Eat well in pregnancy

This leaflet will give you information on safe and healthy eating during pregnancy. If you have specific dietary needs, for example, if you are very underweight, very overweight, or have diabetes, please ask your midwife at the antenatal clinic. If necessary they can refer you to a Registered Dietitian for further advice.

Do you need to change what you eat?

You do not need to follow a special diet during pregnancy. However, it is important that you eat a good variety of foods so that your body receives all the nourishment it needs for you and your growing baby. If you have been eating a healthy diet during the months before your pregnancy there are very few changes you will need to make, but now is a good time to take a closer look at what you eat.

Why is folic acid important?

If you haven't already received information about folic acid, then read on:

You can reduce the risk of having a baby born with a neural tube defect such as spina bifida by increasing your intake of a B vitamin called folic acid. Once you start planning a pregnancy, or as soon as you know you are pregnant if it was unplanned, take a 400mcg folic acid supplement until 12 weeks of pregnancy. You may be advised to take a larger dose of folic acid (5mg) if your body mass index is 30 or above or if you have diabetes or coeliac disease, had a previous pregnancy with a NTD or take drugs for epilepsy. This can be bought from a local chemist or ask your GP for a prescription.

For more advice on vitamins see page 6

Coping with sickness and cravings

If you suffer from nausea or sickness at the beginning of your pregnancy you may find that eating small meals with snacks in between may help. Or if you have an increased appetite you may find you want to eat more frequently so try to avoid high calorie portions.

To eat a healthy, well balanced diet, choose a variety of different foods from each of the food groups.

- Fruit and vegetables
- Meat, fish, eggs, beans and other non dairy sources of protein
- Milk and dairy foods
- Bread, rice, potatoes, pasta and other starchy foods. (Choose "Low GI foods" – see later)

See Eatwell Plate leaflet or www.eatwell.gov.uk/healthydiet/eatwellplate



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Fruit and vegetables

Provide plenty of vitamins, minerals and fibre. Eat a variety of different types:

- Fruits: fresh, tinned in juice, stewed, dried, frozen, fruit juice.
- Vegetables: fresh, frozen, tinned
- Salads

Aim for 5 servings each day.

Meat, fish, eggs, beans and other non-dairy sources of protein

Provide protein, vitamins and minerals including iron.

- Choose 2 portions from this group each day
- If you eat meat, have different types for variety but cut off visible fat

Avoid eating any shark, swordfish and marlin. Limit the amount of tuna you eat to no more than two tuna steaks a week (weighing about 140g cooked or 170g raw) or four medium-size cans of tuna a week (with a drained weight of about 140g per can). This is because of the levels of mercury in these fish. At high levels, mercury can harm a baby's developing nervous system.

Aim for 2 portions of fish per week, one of which should be oily. This is good for your health and the development of your baby. **Oily fish** includes canned **or** fresh sardines, pilchards, herring, mackerel, salmon and **fresh tuna**. Limit canned tuna to 4 medium cans per week.

Limiting your intake of oily fish to twice a week will ensure that you get all the useful nutrients without consuming harmful levels of pollutants.

For more information on safe levels of fish during pregnancy & breastfeeding go to www.nhs.uk

Bread, rice, potato pasta and other starchy foods

These are carbohydrate-containing foods which affect blood sugar levels and contain fibre, vitamins and minerals. Other foods in this group include: chapatti & breakfast cereals

- The best types are those without too much fat added to them.
- Carbohydrate should be spread out over the day, have some starch at each meal.
- Only about a third of the food you eat should be carbohydrates
- Try high fibre varieties such as wholemeal bread, brown rice and pasta and high fibre breakfast cereals e.g. Weetabix, All Bran, Bran Flakes, Shredded Wheat.
- Choosing these foods, as well as fruit and vegetables and plenty of fluids (8 - 10 cups per day) will help to prevent constipation.

Different carbohydrate foods affect blood sugar (glucose) levels differently – the Glycaemic Index (GI) is a measure of this.

- Foods with a low GI release their sugar slowly into the blood, and may help to reduce excess weight gain, making them better choices

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Low GI Foods (choose regularly)	High GI Foods (choose less often)
Oats, oat-based cereals e.g. muesli, porridge Fruit & Fibre type cereals. Special K, Allbran	Cornflakes, Rice Krispies
Multi grain bread (granary type - the more grains the better) Pitta bread Rye bread Chapattis Fruit bread Oatcakes	White, brown or wholemeal bread, Bagels, crumpets
Pasta (made from durum wheat) and noodles Basmati or American long-grain rice Pearl barley Buckwheat or bulgar wheat Sweet Potato and Yams	Pasta (not made from durum wheat) Other rice varieties Potatoes
All types of fruit Diet or low-fat yoghurt Low sugar milk puddings	
Peas, sweetcorn, lentils, beans especially kidney, soya and haricot (including baked beans), chick peas and dahls	Parsnips, pumpkin, swede

- **High GI foods do not need avoiding altogether.** Try to reduce how often you eat them, only have a small portion or try combining them with a low GI food as this will reduce the overall GI e.g. if you choose potatoes with a casserole, serve with a large portion of low GI vegetables
- Some foods have a low or medium GI because they are high in fat (which can slow absorption). This does not make them good food choices. Foods in this group include chocolate, peanuts and crisps, so avoid having these regularly.

Milk and dairy foods contain protein for the growth of your baby and calcium needed for bones and teeth.

Try and have 3 servings each day from this list:-

- ½ pint (200ml) semi-skimmed milk
- 1 carton (150g) low-fat yoghurt
- 1 oz (30g) cheese

Choose skimmed or semi-skimmed milk or low-fat yoghurt. They contain as much calcium as the full fat varieties.

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If you eat non dairy milks /yogurts check they have calcium added. Other sources of calcium include tofu, almonds, tahini, dried fruit, dhal, beans, green leafy vegetables, broccoli, sardines, and whitebait.

If you do not eat foods from this group, discuss the need for a calcium supplement with your midwife or doctor.

Calcium

Calcium is important for building baby's bones and your body uses quite a lot more in pregnancy than it does when you are not pregnant. Shortage of calcium in the diet leads to an increased risk of blood pressure problems. For this reason, all pregnant women will be offered a calcium supplement to take once a day, (from your first appointment after the 12 week scan).

Very rarely, a woman might have high calcium levels and such women will not be given calcium supplements.

Iron

Many of the foods from the Meat, fish, eggs, beans and other non-dairy sources of protein are good sources of iron.

Other foods containing iron include peas, dahls, green leafy vegetables and breakfast cereals with iron added.

The iron from vegetable foods is absorbed by the body better if you choose a food rich in Vitamin C at the same meal, such as fruit juice or citrus fruit, and avoid drinking tea at mealtimes.

Foods containing fat and foods containing sugar

- Use only very small amounts of butter, ghee, margarine, oil and mayonnaise.
- Only have the following snacks/foods occasionally: crisps, chocolate, sugary drinks (fizzy drinks, fruit juices and energy drinks), sweets, Indian sweets, pakora, samosa, chevda, ganthia, cakes, pastries and puddings.

If you have been advised to cut down on your eating to slow down your weight gain, you should reduce your intake of these foods.

What about my weight?

All women should expect to gain some weight when pregnant, especially at the end of pregnancy, and each woman is different. As a rough guide overweight pregnant women should gain about (6kg), normal weight women should gain about (12kg) and underweight pregnant women should gain about (19kg).

For further information and advice, ask your Midwife or Dietitian.

It is not advisable to try and lose weight during pregnancy

Alcohol ?

It is not recommended to drink alcohol whilst trying to get pregnant or during pregnancy. If you drink heavily during your pregnancy there is a risk that your baby's growth will be reduced and that he/she may develop learning/behavioural problems (foetal alcohol syndrome (FAS))

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Food safety

Pregnant women and their unborn babies are more vulnerable to certain bacteria found in food. You may have heard of **salmonella**, **listeria**, and a condition called **toxoplasmosis**.

You are advised to take the following precautions to avoid these infections.

Food preparation

- Keep work surfaces clean
- Wash hands before and after preparing food
- Store raw meat covered at the bottom of the fridge separate from foods which are ready to be eaten
- Defrost frozen meat thoroughly before cooking
- Keep utensils such as knives and chopping boards used for raw meat and poultry separate. Wash thoroughly afterwards
- Wash all vegetables, salads and fruits thoroughly
- Cook or reheat all foods (especially ready meals) until they are piping hot
- Check 'use-by' dates on packaging
- Try to keep pets away from the kitchen and prepare pet food separately
- When handling cat litter, wear gloves and wash your hands afterwards, to prevent toxoplasmosis which can be harmful to unborn babies.

Which foods are safe to eat?

Avoid	Eat instead
Raw or soft boiled eggs.	Eggs cooked until white and yolk are solid.
Raw eggs in homemade mayonnaise, mousse, ice-cream and icing.	Pasteurised egg products (powder or liquid form). Shop bought mayonnaise.
Undercooked poultry. Pre-cooked chilled chicken from retail outlets.	Poultry, if properly defrosted, well cooked and eaten immediately.
Mould ripened soft cheeses such as brie, camembert, blue veined cheeses, and goat's cheese.	Hard cheeses such as cheddar and Cheshire, parmesan, cottage cheese, processed cheese and cheese spreads.
Pâté made from meat, fish or vegetables.	
Soft whip ice-cream from machines.	Other ice-cream or ice lollies.
Unpasteurised cow's, sheep's or goat's milk and unpasteurised milk products.	Pasteurised, sterilised or UHT milks.
Raw seafood, e.g. prawns, cockles, mussels, sold 'loose'.	Seafood which is part of a hot meal and has been thoroughly cooked.
Raw or undercooked meat.	Thoroughly cooked meat, especially sausages or minced meat.
Some raw fish dishes	sushi and other dishes made with raw fish as long as the fish used to make

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	it has been frozen or smoked first
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Vitamin A

It is recommended that pregnant women should avoid liver, liver pâté, liver sausage and fish liver oil supplements, as they contain very large amounts of the animal form of vitamin A (retinol). In a very few cases, very high intakes of retinol have been associated with birth deformities.

Avoid vitamin supplements containing Vitamin A –to include fish oil supplements- if you are unsure, ask your pharmacist, GP or midwife.

Iodine

Iodine is important during pregnancy for baby's brain development and for good intelligence during childhood .It is important to ensure you eat foods that contain iodine, equally it is important not to eat too much.

How much iodine do I need?

Life stage	Iodine required per day (mcg)
Adults	150
Pregnancy	250
Breast feeding	250

Where is iodine found in the diet?

Iodine is found in a range of foods, good sources include fish and dairy products. Seaweed is very high in iodine especially brown seaweed such as kelp and therefore eating seaweed more than once a week is not recommended, especially during pregnancy.

Milk and dairy products are the main sources of iodine for most people. (Organic milk has lower iodine content).

Some table salts have been iodised but as too much salt is not good for health it is not recommended to use this to increase iodine in the diet.

The amount of iodine in foods varies according to the iodine content in the soil, farming practice, type of fish and the season. For this reason the table below is for guidance only

Food	Portion	Average amount of iodine per portion (mcg)
Cow's milk	200ml	50-80 **
Organic cow's milk	200ml	30-65 **
Yogurt	150g	50-100 **
Eggs	1 egg (50g)	20
Cheese	40g	15
White fish	100g	115
Oily fish	100g	50
Shell fish	100g	90
Meat	100g	10

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Poultry	100g	10
Nuts	25g	5
Bread	1 slice (46g)	5
Fruit and veg	80g	3

** depends on the season, higher value in winter

(Table taken from BDA Iodine, Food fact Sheet)

Who is at risk of iodine deficiency?

Most people who eat milk, dairy and fish should get enough iodine through their diet.

People who do not eat dairy or fish (e.g. those with an intolerance or allergy or vegetarians particularly vegans) can be at risk.

What about supplements?

If you feel you may not be getting enough iodine in your diet please discuss with your health visitor.

Most pregnancy multivitamin/mineral supplements do contain iodine (140-150mcg should be enough so that you can get the rest from your diet)

If you have thyroid problems, are taking any medication or have had iodine deficiency previously please discuss with your GP/health visitor before taking any iodine supplements.

Vitamin D

In pregnancy you will require a supplement containing at least 10mcg of vitamin D per day. Some people who are at risk of very low vitamin D levels will require a higher dose of Vitamin D especially if you

- Cover most of your skin when you go outdoors (this includes clothing and sunscreen)
- Do not go outdoors in the sun very often
- Are of African-Caribbean or South Asian origin
- Have a restricted diet e.g. vegan

(Discuss with your GP if you feel you are at risk)

Vitamin D is very important for the development of the foetus and for preventing rickets during childhood.

Healthy Start Vitamins for Women contain the supplements that are recommended in pregnancy (Folic Acid, Vitamin D & Vitamin C). These are available in Health Centres & some children's centres (ask your midwife). For women who don't qualify for free vitamins these can be bought very cheaply. Ask your midwife for advice on which supplement to take.

Peanut allergy

If you would like to eat peanuts or food containing peanuts (such as peanut butter) during pregnancy, you can choose to do so as part of a healthy balanced diet, unless you are allergic to them or your health professional advises you not to.

The latest research has shown that there is no clear evidence to say if eating or not eating peanuts during pregnancy affects the chances of your baby developing a peanut allergy.

Patient Information

Department of Health website: www.nhs.uk

Caffeine

Current advice from the Food Standards Agency is that pregnant women limit their caffeine intake to 200mg per day.

Item	amount of caffeine
• one mug of instant coffee:	100mg
• one mug of filter coffee:	140mg
• one mug of tea:	75mg
• one can of cola:	40mg
• one can of energy drink:	80mg
• one 50g bar of plain (dark) chocolate:	50mg
• one 50g bar of milk chocolate:	25mg

Try to avoid energy drinks as they are high in caffeine and sugar and harmful to teeth.

Remember that caffeine is also found in certain cold and flu remedies. Always check with your GP or another health professional before taking any medication or over-the-counter remedies.

Further information can be obtained from

NHS Choices	www.eatwell.gov.uk/pregnancy
British Dietetic Association	www.bda.uk.com
Tommys	www.tommys.org
Netmums	www.netmums.com
Healthy Start	www.healthystart.nhs.uk

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