



Healthy eating during pregnancy



Health



Wellness



Nutrition



Support

Introduction

Nutrition plays an important role during pregnancy and our nutritional needs change at different stage. This booklet is part of a series to provide support at each stage of the journey.

Please be aware these booklets are given as guidance. Nutritional advice can be subject to change and any advice given by your midwife or a medical health professional should always be followed.

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Healthy eating during pregnancy

General advice on what to eat and drink during pregnancy is pretty much the same as when you aren't pregnant. In both cases it's important to eat a wide range of fruits, vegetables, wholegrains and plant-based foods. It's also recommended we should reduce our salt and saturated fat intake.

While women do need some extra energy to support a growing baby, it's **not true** that women need to 'eat for two'. However, there are some key changes and bits of advice to follow that are important to be aware of.

What you regularly eat and drink can affect the health of you and your baby during pregnancy. There is strong evidence to support the idea that managing your health and following a healthy diet during pregnancy has a direct influence on your baby's health, from birth through to adulthood.

Energy (calorie) needs

You need energy (*technically kilocalories or kcals, though commonly referred to simply as 'calories'*) for the growth and development of your baby. During the first and second trimesters, however, it's unlikely you'll need to eat more calories than usual. Guidelines in the UK state women should aim for 2,000 kcals per day and this is enough to support a growing baby up to 28 weeks.

During the third trimester (28 weeks onwards), advice is to eat around 2,200 kcals per day - an additional 200 calories. This extra energy intake supports a pregnant body to continue to provide energy for the mother and the additional needs of the growing baby.

Eating more than the recommended number of calories is one of the main reasons for additional increases in body weight and body fat during pregnancy, above what is to be expected.

Highly processed foods, and foods that contain high amounts of added sugars, saturated fats and salt, should be limited as they can cause us to eat more and contain higher amounts of calories with less nutritional quality. More natural food products help provide feelings of fullness and can prevent overeating without the need to count calories.

Food and eating with pregnancy symptoms

Women experience different symptoms throughout their pregnancy which can make it harder to eat healthily....

Sickness, nausea and vomiting

Commonly known as 'morning sickness', hyperemesis can happen at any time of the day. Most women will experience feelings of sickness in the first half of pregnancy. This can come and go and include some vomiting. It can be difficult to think of eating healthy as the body is craving nutrients, which often leads us to

eating and drinking more processed foods that release energy quickly. Speak to your partner and ask them to help by regularly bringing you foods and drink as this can be useful in managing cravings after sickness.

If the vomiting is severe to the point that you are losing weight, are unable to keep food down for more than 24 hours, or you have any other symptoms that are unusual, contact your midwife, GP or call NHS 111.

Top tips for sickness:

1. Eat smaller meals and snacks and eat them more often throughout the day.
2. Stay hydrated by sipping on water throughout the day.
3. Choose foods that are plain and don't have too many strong smells.

Cravings and dislikes

Some women have cravings and dislikes for some foods and drinks during pregnancy. We're not exactly sure why, but it is common. Food cravings are strong urges for some foods - even outside of usual mealtimes and when we aren't particularly hungry. These feelings can be very strong, more than normal feelings of hunger and can be very difficult to resist.

The type of food craved is different for everyone and may change over the course of your pregnancy. Sometimes food and drink tastes can change, meaning a pregnant woman can start to enjoy foods they didn't previously, or start to dislike the taste and smells of foods they normally enjoy.

The most common cravings include chocolate, sweets, pizza, crisps, fruit, ice cream, pickles and curry. While you shouldn't deny yourself, it's important to remember that overeating highly processed foods can easily lead to higher calories, added sugars, salt and saturated fat in your diet. Our bodies know these foods have quick and easy-to-access energy which is why we crave them. While the occasional snack or treat is ok, these foods are easy to overeat.

If cravings and dislikes become strong, causing your diet to be very limited, you may miss out on important nutrients. If you're concerned, speak to your midwife.

Top tips for cravings:

1. Eat a small amount of the food you crave alongside a healthier alternative.
2. If you have a sweet craving, try food that's naturally sweet such as berries.
3. Batch cook main meals and freeze them for when the craving kicks in. Homemade meals are usually healthier than takeaway or pre-packaged foods.

Heartburn

Towards the end of pregnancy, as the baby takes up more space in the abdomen, heartburn can be a problem for some women. The best way to avoid heartburn is to eat little and often throughout the day and avoid large meals, particularly in the evening.

Some women find foods that are spicy or high in fat can lead to heartburn too. If you would like support with antacids, you should always ask a pharmacist or consult your GP to check what's appropriate for you.

Top tips for heartburn:

1. Eat little and often throughout the day and limit large meals.
2. Identify which foods make the heartburn worse (e.g. spicy or high fat foods) and limit these.

Constipation

Some women may find they become constipated during pregnancy. This may be because you are eating differently or are being less active. To avoid constipation, it's important to get plenty of fluids and increase the intake of high fibre foods such as wholegrain bread, pasta and rice, wholegrain breakfast cereals, fruits and vegetables, nuts and seeds, and beans and pulses.

Top tips for constipation:

1. Choose higher fibre foods such as wholegrains, leave the skin on fruit and veg, and add beans and pulses to meals.
2. Stay hydrated and drink plenty of water.

Omega-3

Omega-3s are healthy fatty acids our bodies can't make, which means we must get them from our food. These fatty acids have an important role in a healthy body, but we in the UK typically don't eat enough.

Omega-3 is key to your baby's health and important in the development of your baby's brain. It is mainly found in oily fish such as mackerel, salmon or sardines and we should try to eat two portions per week (a portion of fish is roughly the size of your hand).

Other common foods that contain omega-3 are nuts and seeds such as flax seeds, chia seeds and walnuts. Seeds are great sprinkled onto breakfasts and nuts as a healthy snack.

Omega-3s are available as supplements and could be an option if eating the above foods won't work. However, by eating the foods listed you'll also get other beneficial nutrients such as protein and healthy fats - making them a better choice for your health over supplements.

Folic acid

Folic acid is an important supplement to take before pregnancy and up to the 12th week (the end of your first trimester). It helps prevent neural tube defects, and in later pregnancy can prevent a particular type of anaemia. The recommended dose is 400µg (micrograms). Good sources of folic acid should also be included in a healthy diet. These include:

- broccoli
- green leafy vegetables such as spinach, kale and cabbage
- wholegrains
- beans
- oranges
- folic acid fortified products

Iron

The body needs extra iron to ensure your baby has enough blood supply and receives the necessary oxygen and nutrients. Foods high in iron include:

- red meat (e.g. beef and lamb)
- beans and other pulses
- dark leafy green vegetables
- wholemeal bread
- dried fruit (such as apricots)
- fortified foods (such as breakfast cereals)

Vitamin C helps your body absorb iron, so making meals that are high in iron and Vitamin C is useful. For example, have a glass of orange juice with beans on toast. Tea or coffee can decrease the amount of iron your body absorbs, so try not to drink these at mealtimes.

Your iron levels will be checked at your booking appointment and your 28-week appointment (third trimester) to ensure you have adequate levels required for pregnancy and birth. Iron supplementation may be prescribed by your healthcare team if your levels are too low.

Vitamin A

Vitamin A is important for good health and for the healthy development of your baby, but you should **avoid** large amounts. You should not take any supplements containing Vitamin A or retinol. Be careful with multivitamin supplements which

may contain these, and fish liver oil supplements such as cod liver oil. You should also limit eating liver and liver products such as pâté as they are very high in Vitamin A.

Calcium

Calcium is important for bone health and calcium needs are increased during pregnancy. However, the body adapts and will absorb more calcium so we do not need to eat more of it. Two to three portions of dairy a day is recommended to ensure your calcium needs are met and this is the same during pregnancy.

Good sources of calcium include:

- milk
- cheese
- yoghurt
- soya drink fortified with calcium
- dark leafy green vegetables
- almonds and Brazil nuts
- tofu

To help with calorie control, lower fat dairy options also contain high levels of calcium but at reduced calories. Try to avoid yoghurts and milk with added flavours and sugars, and instead combine them with fresh or frozen fruit for taste.

Vitamin D

It's important for pregnant women to take a daily 10µg Vitamin D supplement for bone development as we struggle to get enough through food. Vitamin D helps your body absorb calcium from your diet, which is particularly important for the growth and development of your baby's bones and helps to maintain the health of your bones too.

Most adults produce most of their Vitamin D through the action of sunlight on the skin, but the sun in the UK is only strong enough to produce Vitamin D in the summer months. Therefore, between October and March you should consider taking a daily Vitamin D supplement. Women who are at particular risk of low Vitamin D levels include those who have darker skin, those who spend lots of time indoors, and those who cover their skin with clothing.

Some foods including oily fish, eggs, red meat and fortified foods contain small amounts of Vitamin D, but it would be difficult to get the amount you need from food alone.

Vitamin supplements

You can speak to your GP or pharmacist for further advice about supplements. Your GP may be able to prescribe them to you.

If you're on income-related benefits or under 18, you may be entitled to free vitamins via the Healthy Start scheme. Women who are eligible for this scheme can get free vitamins until their child is 12 months old. This includes 400µg of folic acid, 10µg of Vitamin D, and 70µg of Vitamin C.

More information about Healthy Start, including information on how to apply for the scheme, can be found at www.healthystart.nhs.uk/how-to-apply.

The Foodwise in Pregnancy app

The Foodwise in Pregnancy app has useful information on eating well, keeping active and achieving health weight gain in pregnancy. There are six sections to work through at your own pace, including interactive games, quizzes and tools. It also features:

- Tips and advice for achieving a healthy diet
- Practical ideas for keeping active
- Recipes, shopping tips and a meal planner
- Step-by-step exercises ideal for pregnancy

The app is free to download for iPhone and Android. Just search 'Foodwise in Pregnancy' in your usual app store.

Find out more

For all other information on healthy eating during pregnancy, speak to your midwife who will be able to advise you further, or visit the links below:

First Steps Nutrition Trust

www.firststepsnutrition.org/eating-well-early-years

Wigan Council Ante Natal Support

www.wigan.gov.uk/Resident/Health-Social-Care/Children-and-young-people/Health-and-wellbeing/Early-Years.aspx

NHS Ante Natal Support

www.wvl.nhs.uk/antenatal-information

Family Hubs

www.wigan.gov.uk/Resident/Education/Family-Hubs/index.aspx

If you would like to learn more or require more information and support, please get in touch!

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