



Your important health information

Healthy eating in pregnancy

It is important to eat well during your pregnancy. What you eat when pregnant affects both you and your growing baby, during pregnancy and later life. You may hear a lot of information about what foods you should or should not eat during your pregnancy. This can be confusing.

Following the Australian Dietary Guidelines is a great guide for a healthy pregnancy:

Food groups	Number of serves recommended in pregnancy each day	Examples of one serve
Fruit	2	1 medium apple, orange 1 cup diced/canned fruit 2 small apricots, plums or only occasionally 1½ tablespoons sultanas ½ cup fruit juice
Vegetables	5	½ cup cooked vegetables 1 cup raw/salad vegetables
Wholegrain breads and cereals	8½	1 slice bread ¼ cup muesli ⅔ cup cereal flakes ½ cup cooked rice, pasta, noodles, quinoa, barley ½ medium roll ½ cup cooked porridge
Reduced fat dairy or alternatives	2½	2 slices cheese 1 cup milk or alternatives (for example, soy milk) with at least 100mg of calcium per 100ml 200g yoghurt
Lean meat or alternatives	3½	65g cooked meat 100g cooked fish 170g tofu 1 cup cooked legumes/beans for example lentils, chickpeas 80g cooked chicken 2 large eggs 30g nuts, seeds

Eating a variety of foods, and enough food from all of the five food groups each day will help you and baby to get the nutrients that you need. The fibre from foods such as wholegrains, fruit and vegetables can also help prevent constipation. Limiting extra foods that are high in saturated fat, added sugars and added salt can help prevent you gaining too much weight.

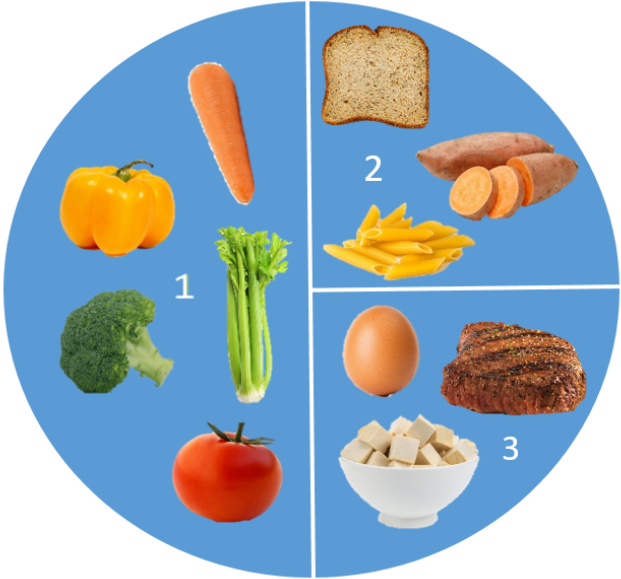
For further advice talk with your doctor, midwife or dietitian. For more information refer to the [Healthy eating during your pregnancy](#) brochure. This can be found via www.eatforhealth.gov.au. 'Eating for two' does not mean doubling what you eat. The amount of extra energy (or calories) you need during pregnancy is actually quite small.

In fact:

- During the first trimester you don't need any extra energy (so no extra food is needed). During the second trimester you need about 15% more (1400 kilojoules/330 calories) than usual. For example, add two slices of bread and a handful of almonds.
- In the third trimester you only need about 20% more energy (1900 kilojoules/450 calories) than usual. For example, add ½ a cup of baked beans to the two slices of bread and a handful of almonds.

Portion Plate

The below portion plate is a guide to help you choose the right variety and balance of food.

<p>1. Aim for half of the meal to be a variety of non-starchy vegetables; such as salad, carrot, zucchini, or broccoli (size of two open hands).</p>	
<p>2. Choose a carbohydrate with slow release energy such as; wholegrain bread, quinoa, sweet potato, pasta, corn, legumes or basmati rice. This should be about a quarter of the meal (the size of your fist).</p>	
<p>3. Choose a high protein food such as lean red meat, chicken, fish, legumes, dairy foods, eggs or tofu. This should be about a quarter of the meal (the size of the palm of your hand).</p>	
<p>4. You will need to include the recommended serves of fruit and dairy (such as milk, yoghurt or cheese) in your meals and snacks. See page 6 for an example meal plan.</p>	

Multivitamins and supplements

There are three vitamins/minerals that are often supplemented during pregnancy, as it can be very difficult to get enough from our food alone.

Folic acid (folate) - 400 micrograms (mcg or μg) daily for at least the first 3 months of pregnancy to reduce the risk of birth defects. Some women may be advised by their doctor to take a higher dose of 5mg. For example, those with pre-existing diabetes or a history of neural tube defects.

Iodine - 150mcg daily throughout the pregnancy for baby's brain development. Women with pre-existing thyroid conditions should check with their doctor before taking a supplement.

Vitamin D- 400IU daily throughout the pregnancy for development of baby's bones and teeth.

Most pregnancy multivitamins contain folate, iodine and vitamin D in adequate amounts. Check the label or ask your pharmacist, doctor or midwife if you are unsure.

You should continue to eat foods high in these nutrients:

- Folate is found in green leafy vegetables, legumes, bread with added folic acid and breakfast cereals.
- Iodine is found in seafood, dairy, seaweed and bread with added iodine.
- Vitamin D is found in oily fish, fortified milk and margarine, and egg yolks, but the main source is from sun exposure.

Iron

You need more iron in your diet while you are pregnant. Many women can get enough by regularly eating foods high in iron.

Iron is found in lean red meat, legumes, green leafy vegetables and cereals with added iron.

If your tests show you are low in iron you may need to take an additional iron supplement, as it can be difficult to increase low iron stores with diet alone.

Vegan and vegetarian diets (or eating little meat in pregnancy)

If you are following a vegan or vegetarian diet (or eating less meat in pregnancy), you may be at risk of some nutrient deficiencies such as protein, iron, calcium and vitamin B12. For further advice talk with your doctor, midwife or dietitian.

Weight gain recommendations

In your first trimester it is recommended to gain 0.5 – 2kg.

After this time, the amount of recommended weight gain will depend on your BMI (Body Mass Index) before pregnancy.

If your pre-pregnancy BMI was...	Single pregnancy suggested average weekly weight gain in the second and third trimesters	Single pregnancy recommended total weight gain	Twins or multi pregnancy recommended total weight gain
Less than 18.kg/m ²	500g	12.5 – 18kg	Speak to your doctor or dietitian
18.5 to 24.9 kg/m ²	400g	11.5 – 16kg	17 – 25kg
Above 25 kg/m ²	300g	7 – 11.5 kg	14 – 23kg
Above 30kg/m ²	200g	5 – 9kg	11 – 19kg

To work out your pre-pregnancy BMI

$BMI = \text{pre-pregnancy weight (kg)} \div [\text{height (m)} \times \text{height (m)}]$

For example weight = 60kg height = 1.6m

$BMI = 60 \div (1.6 \times 1.6) = 23.4\text{kg/m}^2$

Food safety

Food poisoning

Some foods, like soft cheeses may contain a bacteria called listeria which can cause listeriosis. Listeriosis is a type of food poisoning that can be harmful to you and your baby. For a list of high risk foods and for more information refer the [Listeria and Food](#) brochure. This can be found via www.foodstandards.gov.au. Avoiding these foods will reduce your risk of listeriosis. However, these foods can eaten if they are cooked until steaming hot as this will destroy the bacteria.

Foods that contain the salmonella bacteria can lead to another type of food poisoning. High risk foods include; raw or undercooked eggs, meat and poultry and should therefore be cooked well before eating. Avoid using eggs with cracked shells. Sesame seeds (including foods such as tahini, halva and hummus) are also high risk and should be avoided in pregnancy.

High allergen foods

Avoiding certain foods such as peanuts during pregnancy does not lower the chance of your child being allergic to those foods. Only avoid foods that you have an allergy to.

Caffeine

Too much caffeine may increase the risk of having a small baby. Aim to have less than 200mg per day.

Check the table below to see how much caffeine common foods and drinks contain:

Product	Serve	Caffeine
Café coffees (espresso or latte) per single coffee shot	250ml	90 – 120mg
Instant coffee (1 teaspoon/cup)	250ml	60 – 80mg
Decaffeinated coffee	250ml	3mg
Tea depends on brew strength (both black and green contain caffeine)	250ml	10 – 50mg
Iced coffee	500ml	30 – 200mg
Energy drinks (for example Monster)*	500ml	160 – 180mg
Cola drinks	375ml	35 – 48mg
Dark chocolate	60g	50mg

*Note energy drink labels state 'not recommended for pregnant women' because of their high caffeine content.

Alcohol

It is not known how much alcohol is safe when pregnant. It is known that the risks to your baby increase with the more you drink. It is safest for you not to drink at all.

Vitamin A

Too much Vitamin A is not recommended during pregnancy. A form of Vitamin A called retinol may be harmful to your developing baby. Liver is very high in this type of vitamin. It is safest is to avoid liver, but if you eat liver, limit to less than 50g per week. Other foods do not contain too much of this. Pregnancy multivitamins contain a different type of Vitamin A called beta carotene that is safe.

Mercury in fish

Fish is a healthy food to eat during your pregnancy. It is high in omega 3 oils and a good source of iodine. Omega 3 oils are important for your baby's brain and eye development. Most fish can safely be eaten 2 to 3 times per week; however, some fish may contain high levels of mercury which can be harmful to your baby's development if eaten in large amounts. The table below lists these fish and how often they can safely be consumed.

Pregnant women (one portion = 150g)
One portion per fortnight of Shark (Flake) or Billfish (Swordfish/Broadbill/Marlin) and no other fish that fortnight. or One portion per week of Orange Roughy (Deep Sea Perch) or Catfish and no other fish that week.

Make sure you avoid raw or smoked fish because of the listeria risk.

Diet and breastfeeding

Eating a variety of healthy foods is important to meet your nutritional needs for breastfeeding. Healthy eating will also allow you to gradually return to your pre-pregnancy weight. For more information refer to the Australian Government 'Healthy eating during your pregnancy' brochure.

Drinking water to satisfy your thirst will ensure you are having enough fluids.

You do not need to avoid high-risk listeria foods once your baby is born.

Continue to follow the mercury and fish and caffeine recommendations as these can pass through to your breastmilk.

It is important to continue to take a daily iodine supplement (that contains 150 micrograms of iodine) while you are breastfeeding for your baby's brain development. It is also recommended you give your baby a Vitamin D supplement of 400 units each day for at least the first six months while you are breastfeeding.

The Australian Breastfeeding Association provides guidance on:

- Breastfeeding and alcohol
- Breastfeeding and caffeine

www.breastfeeding.asn.au/bfinfo/index.html

If you require support with breastfeeding you can contact lactation consultants at:

- **Mercy Hospital for Women**
Phone: 03 8458 4677
- **Werribee Mercy Hospital**
Phone: 03 8754 3407

Other breastfeeding support services:

- The Australian Breastfeeding Association 24 hour helpline, Phone: 1800 686 268
- Maternal and Child Health Helpline, Phone: 13 22 29
- Private Lactation Consultants, www.lcanz.org

Sample meal plan

Breakfast

- ½ cup untoasted muesli or 1 cup Guardian/All Bran + 250ml low fat milk **or**
- 2 slices grain/sourdough toast spread with avocado or poly/monounsaturated margarine + tub of low fat yoghurt **plus**
- Tea/coffee – with small amount low fat milk

Morning tea (snack)

- 1 serve fruit + 4 Vita-Weat with low fat cheese

Lunch

- 2 slices of bread **or** 1 medium bread roll **or** ⅔ cup cooked rice **plus**
- plenty of salad or non-starchy vegetables (½ plate) **plus**
- lean meat or tuna or salmon or skinless chicken or egg **plus**
- 1 serve fruit

Afternoon tea (snack)

- 1 slice wholegrain bread + ½ cup baked beans

Dinner

- 1 cup cooked rice **or** 1-1½ cups cooked pasta **or** 2 medium potatoes **plus**
- plenty of salad or non-starchy vegetables (½ plate) **plus**
- lean meat or skinless chicken or tofu or legumes

Supper (snack)

- 250ml low fat milk + 30g unsalted nuts

What can I drink?

- Choose mainly water, plain mineral and soda water-add fresh lemon or lime for flavour.
- Low fat milk provides a good source of calcium and protein.
- Tea, coffee, diet soft drink and diet cordials can be consumed in moderation.

Further Information

If you have any questions regarding this information, please contact:

Dietetics Department

Mercy Hospital for Women

Phone: 03 8458 4165

Werribee Mercy Hospital

Phone: 03 8754 3100

Acknowledgements

Produced by: Mercy Health Dietitians

Date produced: March 2016

Date of last review: February 2024

Date for review: February 2027