

## Your important health information

# Healthy eating in pregnancy

It is important to eat well during your pregnancy. What you eat while you are 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 <i>or only occasionally</i> 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

You should focus on eating a variety of foods from the five food groups every day. The fibre in many of these will also help with constipation. You should limit foods that are high in saturated fat, added sugars and added salt. This helps make sure that you get the nutrients you need for your baby without gaining too much weight.

You should be cautious of any diets that recommend removing food groups all together.

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](http://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.

## Multivitamins and supplements

There are three vitamins/minerals you will need more of during pregnancy as it can be very difficult to get enough from our food alone.

Folic acid (folate) - 400 micrograms (mcg or  $\mu\text{g}$ ) daily for the first trimester to reduce the risk of certain birth defects. Some women will need to take a higher dose of 5mg. For example, those with pre-existing diabetes or a history of neural tube defects. Ask your doctor if you are not sure.

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 these nutrients 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, 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 egg yolks but the main source is via sunlight 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.

It can be difficult to increase your iron stores with diet alone.

## 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 <sup>2</sup>	500g	12.5 – 18kg	Speak to your doctor or dietitian
18.5 to 24.9 kg/m <sup>2</sup>	400g	11.5 – 16kg	17 – 25kg
Above 25 kg/m <sup>2</sup>	300g	7 – 11.5 kg	14 – 23kg
Above 30kg/m <sup>2</sup>	200g	5 – 9kg	11 – 19kg

## To work out your pre-pregnancy BMI

BMI = pre-pregnancy weight (kg) ÷ [height (m) x height (m)]

For example weight = 60kg height = 1.6m

BMI = 60 ÷ (1.6 x 1.6) = 23.4kg/m<sup>2</sup>

## Food safety

### Food poisoning

Soft cheeses, like feta, 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](http://www.foodstandards.gov.au). Avoiding these foods will greatly reduce your risk of listeriosis.

Foods that contain the salmonella bacteria can lead to another type of food poisoning. Raw or undercooked eggs, meat and poultry are high risk foods and should therefore be cooked well. Avoid using eggs with cracked shells.

### 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. 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.

<b>Pregnant women (one serve = 150g)</b>
One serve per fortnight of Shark (Flake) or Billfish (Swordfish/Broadbill/Marlin) and no other fish that fortnight.
or
One serve per week of Orange Roughy (Deep Sea Perch) or Catfish and no other fish that week.
or
Two to three serves per week of any fish and seafood not listed above, including Tuna.

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

## 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 while you are breastfeeding for your baby's brain development.

The Australian Breastfeeding Association provides guidance on:

- Breastfeeding and alcohol
- Breastfeeding and caffeine

[www.breastfeeding.asn.au/bfinfo/index.html](http://www.breastfeeding.asn.au/bfinfo/index.html)

### 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: October 2021

Date for review: October 2023

This document provides general information only and is not intended to replace advice about your health from a qualified practitioner. If you are concerned about your health, you should seek advice from a qualified practitioner.