

Nutrition for a Healthy Pregnancy

Nutrition for Pre-Pregnancy Through Delivery

General

- Once pregnant, you should gain 25-35 lbs if you are a normal weight.
- Protein requirements increase from ~46g to as much as 71g per day during pregnancy.
- Low carb diets are not appropriate for pregnancy. Women require a minimum of 100-175g of carbohydrate per day in pregnancy. At least half should be whole grains.
- As much as 33% of calories can come from fat; emphasize polyunsaturated fats (fatty fish, flax oil, grass-fed animal products) and monounsaturated (olive oil, nuts and seeds, avocado). Avoid trans fats and limit saturated fat.

Water

Water is vital to the expansion of your blood supply. Drink at least 9 cups of fluid per day and avoid water bottles containing BPA.



Iron Status

Pre-pregnancy is the best time to build your iron stores if they are low. Have your iron checked and supplement separately if directed by your doctor.

Food Quality/Safety

The small size of your baby and their extra needs for growth make them more sensitive to chemicals and non-food substances.

- Eating organic will minimize your baby's contact with pesticides, antibiotics, steroid hormones, and most food additives. This includes not just fruits and vegetables, but also using organic dairy, meat, and packaged food sources.
- There is sufficient evidence from animal studies to raise concern over the consumption of genetically modified foods (GMOs). Corn, soy, and canola foods are typically GMO—look for organic sources or avoid.
- The increased progesterone associated with pregnancy makes you more vulnerable to infection, so foodborne illness is a risk. Make sure to wash fruits and vegetables thoroughly and eat only well-cooked meats. Avoid raw eggs (including batter) and fish. Cat litter sometimes harbors a parasite, so have another family member change it.
- Mercury can cause serious consequences to brain health, so avoid large, predatory fish like shark, swordfish, tilefish and albacore tuna.

Supplementation

There is an increased requirement for many nutrients during pregnancy. A good multivitamin can cover many of these needs. Here are the nutrients of most concern:

- Folic acid—this nutrient is essential for adequate replication of DNA, growth of the fetus, and protection from neural tube defects. It is recommended for all pregnant women to take 400mcg of folic acid per day. Requirements for multiple fetuses are higher.
- Vitamin D--deficiencies in this nutrient are very common, especially in pregnant women. The best source of Vitamin D is unprotected exposure to sunlight. Vitamin D is very important to skeletal development and gene regulation. A good multivitamin will have 1000-2000IUs of Vitamin D. If your levels are low, your doctor may recommend up to 4000 IUs per day.
- Choline—essential for brain development in the fetus. The average shortfall in the American diet versus the requirement for pregnancy is 200mg. Meat and eggs are the best source of choline, so you may not need to supplement if you eat these foods daily.
- Iodine—The need for iodine increases from 150 to 220 mcg during pregnancy. The best source is iodized salt, along with fish and shellfish. Finding a multivitamin that provides up to 150mcg of iodine is a good way to assure that you meet the increased need for this nutrient.
- Iron—Iron requirements increase from 18 to 27 mg during pregnancy. If your iron tends to be low, if you have fatigue, or if you are vegan or vegetarian, it is important to have your iron levels checked. If stores are low, it is best to supplement separately. If adequate, a multivitamin with up to 18 mg is sufficient.
- DHA—this fatty acid is also very important to brain development. Supplementation with 400-500mg per day has been shown to give benefit.
- Calcium—the RDA for calcium is not higher in pregnancy because calcium absorption improves, with the exception of the third trimester (increases by 300 mg). If you do not eat dairy you may want to consider supplementation, especially in the 3rd trimester.

Avoid

- Alcohol and caffeine pass easily from the mother's blood to the fetus. While 1-2 cups of coffee will not do harm, alcohol should be strictly avoided.
- Vitamin A can cause birth defects if taken in excess. Consumption should not exceed 10,000 IUs per day, and some should be consumed as beta carotene.
- Avoid all chemicals and smoking. BPA disrupts hormone balance and can be found in the lining of canned foods, foods packaged in plastic, and some water bottles.

Sources:

Brown JE. Nutrition Through the Life Cycle. 5th ed. Stamford, CT: Cengage Learning; 2014.
Greene A. Feeding Baby Green. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass: 2009.