

A good diet is vital to health during pregnancy. It is essential to understand the importance of nutrients in the body. Eating nutritious foods is one of the most significant ways in which you can contribute to the health of your newborn baby, enjoy your pregnancy, and recover faster postpartum. The food you eat in pregnancy forms the building blocks of growth and development to help ensure a healthy baby.

Eating a nutritious "well balanced diet" is easier said than done. If your diet could use some improvements, remember change can be hard but is well worth the efforts.

BASIC NUTRITION GUIDELINES FOR PREGNANCY

- Eat regularly throughout the day. Eating 5 smaller meals rather than 3 large meals is easier for your digestive system and will keep your blood sugar levels stable.
- Protein requirements –2 servings per day. Sources are; beans, eggs, fish, low fat cheese, yogurt, poultry, lean meats, nuts, seeds (sesame, pumpkin). Try to include some protein in every meal!
- Whenever you can, eating organic foods, fruits and vegetables is highly recommended because they contain higher vitamin and mineral contents.
- Eat a large variety of fruits and vegetables – 7-8 servings per day
- Fluids are very important - drink at least 6-8 glasses (2 litres) of water each day.
- Whole grains and starches – 6-7 servings per day
- Minimize sugar intake – simple things like diluting fruit juice with water are an easy way to cut down on simple sugars.
- Ensure that iron rich foods are included in your diet. These include dark leafy green vegetables, beans, dried fruit, blackstrap molasses, whole grains, tofu, millet, parsley, brewer's yeast, beets, sea vegetables (dulse), grapes, miso, beets, fish, poultry.
- A low fat diet is healthier - avoid fatty, fried foods.
- Dairy foods are high in lactose (sugar). Find many sources for calcium, not just dairy. Eat calcium rich foods such as tofu, sesame seeds, sardines, salmon and legumes and/or take 1200 mg / day in supplements.
- Minimize or eliminate foods with "empty calories" ie. refined carbohydrates, sugary treats, pop, "junk food", highly processed or convenience foods.
- Although artificial sweeteners such as Aspartame are considered safe in pregnancy, please minimize foods containing them as they often replace nutrient-dense, energy-yielding foods.
- Minimize or eliminate caffeine intake (up to 300 mg / day is considered safe in pregnancy, but limiting caffeine is recommended).
- Please avoid tobacco, alcohol, marijuana, aspirin, laxatives and most over-the-counter drugs. Discuss any medications you currently take with your midwife.

FOOD BORNE ILLNESSES

To avoid food-borne illnesses such as *Toxoplasmosis* and *Listeria*, please follow these general guidelines

- Wash your fruits and vegetables thoroughly
- Avoid un-cooked or under-cooked meats (including sushi)
- Reheat any foods frequently handled prior to eating, including sliced deli meats
- Keep your “hot foods hot” and your “cold foods cold”
- When in doubt, throw it out!
- Avoid soft cheeses, pâtés, and dairy products that are unpasteurized
- Wash hands before and after preparing food and keep food preparation surfaces clean.

If you are uncertain of how to improve your diet, please complete a 3-Day Diet sheet and return it to your midwife at a prenatal visit.

VITAMINS AND SUPPLEMENTS

Prenatal vitamins are generally very similar to an adult multivitamin, with more folic acid and iron. Going to a health food store to purchase your vitamins can provide wider choice and ideally more healthy supplements.

Not every pregnant woman needs a multivitamin. If you are confident that you are eating a well-balanced diet with a wide variety of nutritious foods, you may not need one every day. Some women opt to take individual supplements for vitamins/minerals that they are lacking in their diet.

Some common supplements are:

- *Iron* – hard to eat enough in most diets, 30mg / day required in pregnancy. Increased absorption if taken with Vitamin C. Food based supplements like *Floradix* are easily digested and well absorbed.
- *Calcium* – commonly supplemented by vegans or those preferring a low-dairy diet, 1200-1500mg / day required in pregnancy. Should be taken at a different time of day than iron supplements.
- *Folate* – 0.4 mg / day recommended before and during pregnancy. Easily taken in supplement form.
- *Omega fatty acids* – Fish oils, flaxseed oils, and “omega supplements” are supportive to brain, tissue and nervous system development in both the pregnant mother and the baby. Including a daily source of omega fatty acids improves mood, and supports your baby’s healthy development. Look for fish oils high in DHA, or those formulated for pregnant women. Avoid those sourced from fish livers as they can be toxic in high amounts in pregnancy.