

# Food Fact Sheet: Pregnancy and diet

*Pregnancy is a good time to think about what you're eating. What you eat now will help your baby to grow healthily and give them the best start in life and help you to feel your best.*

## Foods to choose

Eating healthily in pregnancy does not mean going on a special diet and there is no need to eat for two. Eating from the food groups below in three meals and 2-3 snacks per day will provide the nutrients your baby and you need.

Overnight, try not to leave it longer than 12 hours between eating. If you do not usually eat breakfast try a small snack to get your day started.

Potatoes, bread, rice, pasta, other starchy carbohydrates (e.g. cereals, yam, chappatis)

- try to include at every meal (and make the main part of the meal)
- choose wholegrain or higher fibre options with less added fat, salt and sugar
- these give you and your growing baby energy and help to stop you feeling sick.

Fruit and vegetables

- try to eat 5 a day – fresh, frozen, tinned, dried and juiced all count
- these are good for you and your baby as they are full of vitamins, minerals and fibre.

Beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins (e.g. nuts, quorn, tofu)

- eat two portions of these a day and oily fish 1-2 times per week
- one portion = two eggs OR three tablespoons of pulses OR hand (palm) size of meat or fish
- these are good for your baby's overall growth and are a good source of iron (which helps a baby's brain development).

Dairy and alternatives

- try to have three portions a day – one portion = one glass milk (200ml) OR 150g pot of yoghurt OR 30g cheese
- choose low-fat versions unless you are underweight
- these are a good source of calcium (if you eat soya alternatives check that calcium has been added)
- other non-dairy foods that have some calcium include: tahini, spinach, broccoli, tofu, beans, dahl, sardines, almonds, dried fruit
- calcium helps build teeth and bones for your baby and looks after yours too.

Oil and spreads

- try to keep to small amounts
- choose unsaturated oils and low-fat spreads
- minimise eating food and drinks high in fats and sugars (e.g. cakes, biscuits, sweets, crisps) to avoid putting on too much weight during pregnancy.

Fluids (water, fruit teas, skimmed or semiskimmed milk, fresh fruit juice a day)

- have about eight glasses a day (however if you do drink fresh fruit juice, keep this to one glass of your eight for the day)
- drink more if you're being sick or if you're doing exercise
- your baby is living in a watery world inside you – keep that fluid topped up.

## Should I take supplements?

Yes. During pregnancy you need more of some vitamins than you get from food. These can be found in supplements. Two vitamin supplements are needed for pregnancy:

**Folic Acid:** This vitamin can help stop your baby developing neural tube defects (NTDs). Take a supplement with 400 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid every day from before pregnancy (as soon as you stop contraception) until week 12 of your pregnancy. Also add folate rich food to your diet (green vegetables, fortified bread and cereals). You will need more folic acid (5 milligrams (mg) a day) if you have diabetes, had a previous pregnancy with a NTD or take drugs for epilepsy.

**Vitamin D:** Vitamin D helps your baby's bones and teeth to grow properly and keeps your bones and teeth healthy too. Too little could cause rickets in your baby. Take a supplement with 10 micrograms (mcg) of vitamin D every day all through your pregnancy.

Don't take vitamin supplements that have vitamin A when you are pregnant.

## How much weight should I be gaining over the whole pregnancy?

Follow the one, two, three rule. Overweight pregnant women should gain about one stone (6kg), normal weight women should gain about two stone (12kg) and underweight pregnant women should gain about three stone (19kg). You should not try to lose weight while you are pregnant, but it is also important you do not gain too much weight. If you have concerns, ask to be referred to a dietitian.

How can I prevent constipation? Eat wholemeal bread, high-fibre breakfast cereal, fruit and vegetables and drink plenty of water daily.

How can I stop feeling sick? Eat little and often, choose starchy foods e.g. toast and crackers, stop dehydration by drinking little and often. Cold, bland, non-greasy foods are often better tolerated. Try ginger-rich foods or drinks, or wrist acupuncture travel bands. In most cases sickness should have improved by 16-20 weeks.

I've got heartburn. Try eating small not large regular meals and snacks. Avoid fatty, fried and spicy foods.

## Ice cream in pregnancy

Soft ice cream (i.e. that in a tub from the supermarket) should be fine to eat when you're pregnant, as they are processed products made with pasteurised milk and eggs, so any risk of salmonella food poisoning has been eliminated. For homemade ice cream, use a pasteurised egg substitute or follow an egg-free recipe. However, continue to avoid soft-serve ice cream from machines in vans or kiosks. The machines themselves may contain listeria.

## Foods to avoid or be careful with

Take extra care with the following listed in the table due to their possible risks to your baby.

Risk	Avoid	Take care
Salmonella	Avoid raw shellfish; raw and undercooked meats and chicken.	Always wash hands after handling raw meats and poultry and store raw foods separately from cooked foods.
Listeria	Soft ripened cheeses including Brie, Camembert and some goats cheeses; blue veined cheeses e.g. Danish Blue; all unpasteurised dairy products; all types of pâté including vegetable; soft serve ice cream from vans or kiosks.	Ensure takeaway and cooked/chill ready meals are heated thoroughly and piping hot. Chilled food should be stored at the correct temperature (below 5°C). Foods should not be eaten after their 'use by' date.
Contaminants eg mercury, dioxins	Shark, marlin, swordfish	Limit canned tuna to four medium cans per week. Eat oily fish e.g. fresh tuna, salmon, mackerel, sardines, no more than twice per week.
Vitamin A	Multivitamin supplements containing excess retinol form of vitamin A; fish liver oils containing more than 700mcg/day; liver and liver products e.g. pâté, faggots.	
Caffeine		Have no more than 200mg caffeine daily. Limit coffee, tea, cola, high energy drinks and chocolate. No more than two mugs of coffee or three cups of tea a day

## Alcohol in pregnancy

UK guidelines recommend that pregnant women should not drink alcohol at all, and for those planning pregnancy, the safest option is to avoid alcohol. If you drink heavily during pregnancy, your baby could develop a group of problems known as foetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) which include poor growth and learning and behavioural difficulties. If you have any concerns about alcohol consumption in early pregnancy, speak to your midwife.

Eating a varied diet from the main food groups is enough to keep you and your unborn baby healthy. Take a daily supplement of 400mcg folic acid and 10mcg vitamin D. Avoid alcohol and certain foods (listed in the table above).