

Nutrition During Pregnancy

Frequently Asked Questions

Overview

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Instead of “eating for two,” think of it as eating twice as healthy.

If you are pregnant with one fetus, you need an extra 340 **calories** per day starting in the second trimester (and a bit more in the third trimester). That's roughly the calorie count of a glass of skim milk and half a sandwich.

If you are **carrying twins**, you should get about 600 extra calories a day. If you are carrying triplets, you should take in 900 extra calories a day.

Key Vitamins and Minerals

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Why should I take a prenatal vitamin?

Vitamins and minerals play important roles in all of your body functions. Eating healthy foods and taking a prenatal vitamin every day should supply all the vitamins and minerals you need during pregnancy.

How many prenatal vitamins should I take each day?

Take only one serving of your prenatal supplement each day. Read the bottle to see how many pills make up one daily serving. If your [obstetrician–gynecologist \(ob-gyn\)](#) thinks you need an extra amount of a vitamin or mineral, your ob-gyn may recommend it as a separate supplement.

Can I take more prenatal vitamins to make up for a deficiency?

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Nutrient (Daily Recommended Amount)	Why You and Your Fetus Need It	Best Sources
Calcium (1,300 milligrams for ages 14 to 18; 1,000 milligrams for ages 19 to 50)	Builds strong bones and teeth	Milk, cheese, yogurt, sardines, dark green leafy vegetables
Iron (27 milligrams)	Helps red blood cells deliver oxygen to your fetus	Lean red meat, poultry, fish, dried beans and peas, iron-fortified cereals, prune juice
Iodine (220 micrograms)	Essential for healthy brain development	Iodized table salt, dairy products, seafood, meat, some breads, eggs

Nutrient (Daily Recommended Amount)	Why You and Your Fetus Need It	Best Sources
Choline (450 milligrams)	Important for development of your fetus’s brain and spinal cord	Milk, beef liver, eggs, peanuts, soy products
Vitamin A (750 micrograms for ages 14 to 18; 770 micrograms for ages 19 to 50)	Forms healthy skin and eyesight Helps with bone growth	Carrots, green leafy vegetables, sweet potatoes

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Vitamin B6 (1.9 milligrams)	Helps form red blood cells Helps body use protein, fat, and carbohydrates	Beef, liver, pork, ham, whole-grain cereals, bananas
Vitamin B12 (2.6 micrograms)	Maintains nervous system	Meat, fish, poultry, milk (vegetarians should take a supplement)

Nutrient (Daily Recommended Amount)	Why You and Your Fetus Need It	Best Sources
	Helps form red blood cells	
Folic acid (600 micrograms)	Helps prevent birth defects of the brain and spine Supports the general growth and development of the fetus and placenta	Fortified cereal, enriched bread and pasta, peanuts, dark green leafy vegetables, orange juice, beans. Also, take a daily prenatal vitamin with 400 micrograms of folic acid.

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If you have already had a child with an NTD, you should take 4 milligrams (mg) of folic acid each day as a separate supplement at least 3 months before pregnancy and for the first 3 months of pregnancy. You and your ob-gyn can discuss whether you need to supplement with more than 400 micrograms daily.

Why is iron important during pregnancy?

Iron is used by your body to make the extra blood that you and your fetus need during pregnancy. When you are not pregnant, you need 18 mg of iron per day. When you are pregnant, you need 27 mg per day. You can get this amount in most prenatal vitamins.

How can I make sure I'm getting enough iron?

In addition to taking a prenatal vitamin with iron, you should eat iron-rich foods such as beans, lentils, enriched breakfast cereals, beef, turkey, liver, and shrimp. You should also eat foods that help your body absorb iron, including oranges, grapefruit, strawberries, broccoli, and peppers.

Your blood should be tested during pregnancy to check for [anemia](#). If you have anemia, your ob-gyn may recommend extra iron supplements.

What is calcium and what foods contain it?

Calcium is a mineral that builds your fetus's bones and teeth. If you are 18 or younger, you need 1,300 mg of calcium per day. If you are 19 or older, you need 1,000 mg per day.

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Good sources of vitamin D include fortified milk and breakfast cereal, fatty fish (salmon and mackerel), fish liver oils, and egg yolks.

How will I know if I'm getting enough vitamin D?

Many people do not get enough vitamin D. If your ob-gyn thinks you may have low levels of vitamin D, a test can be done to check the level in your blood. If it is below normal, you may need to take a vitamin D supplement.

What is choline and what foods contain it?

Choline plays a role in your fetus's brain development. It may also help prevent some common birth defects. Experts recommend that you get 450 mg of choline each day during pregnancy.

Choline can be found in chicken, beef, eggs, milk, soy products, and peanuts. Although the body produces some choline on its own, it doesn't make enough to meet all your needs while you are pregnant. It's important to get choline from your diet because it is not found in most prenatal vitamins.

What are omega-3 fatty acids and what foods contain omega-3s?

Omega-3 fatty acids are a type of fat found naturally in many kinds of fish. Omega-3s may be important for brain development before and after birth.

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has been linked to birth defects. Do not eat bigeye tuna, king mackerel, marlin, orange roughy, shark, swordfish, or tilefish. Limit white (albacore) tuna to only 6 oz a week. Also check advisories about fish caught in local waters.

What are B vitamins and what foods contain them?

B vitamins, including B1, B2, B6, B9, and B12, are key nutrients during pregnancy. These vitamins

- give you energy
- supply energy for your fetus's development
- promote good vision
- help build the [placenta](#)

Your prenatal vitamin should have the right amount of B vitamins that you need each day. Eating foods high in B vitamins is a good idea too, including liver, pork, chicken, bananas, beans, and whole-grain cereals and breads.

What is vitamin C and what foods contain it?

Vitamin C is important for a healthy immune system. It also helps build strong bones and muscles. During pregnancy, you should get at least 85 mg of vitamin C each day if you are older than 19, and 80 mg if you are younger than 19.

You can get the right amount of vitamin C in your daily prenatal vitamin, and also from citrus fruits and juices, strawberries, broccoli, and tomatoes.

How can I get the right amount of vitamin C?

Drink the right amount of water each day during pregnancy.

Plan your diet

How can I get the right amount of vitamin C?

There are many ways to get the right amount of vitamin C. MyPlate website offers a MyPlate Plan, which shows how much to eat based on how many calories you need each day. The MyPlate Plan is personalized based on your

- height
- prepregnancy weight
- physical activity level

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The MyPlate Plan can help you learn about choosing foods from each food group to get the vitamins and minerals you need during pregnancy. The MyPlate Plan can also help you limit calories from added sugars and saturated fats.

What are the five food groups?

- Grains
- Fruits
- Vegetables
- Protein foods
- Dairy foods

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What types of vegetables should I eat?

You can eat raw, canned, frozen, or dried vegetables or drink 100 percent vegetable juice. Use dark leafy greens to make salads. Make half your plate fruit and vegetables during mealtimes.

What are protein foods?

Meat, poultry, seafood, beans, peas, eggs, processed soy products, nuts, and seeds all contain protein. Eat a variety of protein each day.

What are dairy foods?

Milk and milk products, such as cheese and yogurt, make up the dairy group. Make sure any dairy foods you eat are pasteurized. Choose fat-free or low-fat (1 percent) varieties.

Why are oils and fats important?

Oils and fats are another part of healthy eating. Although they are not a food group, they do give you important nutrients. During pregnancy, the fats that you eat provide energy and help build the placenta and many fetal organs.

What are healthy sources of oils and fats?

Oils in food come mainly from plant sources, such as olive oil, nut oils, and grapeseed oil. The oil from olives.

Most of the oils you eat come from plants. Such as

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Weight Gain During Pregnancy

How much weight should I gain?

Weight gain during pregnancy depends on your weight before pregnancy. For

those who had a normal weight before pregnancy. If you were overweight or obese before pregnancy, you should gain less weight. The amount of weight gain differs by [trimester](#) :

- During your first 12 weeks of pregnancy—the first trimester—you might gain only 1 to 5 pounds or none at all.
- If you were a healthy weight before pregnancy, you should gain a half-pound to 1 pound per week in your second and third trimesters.

See the below table for recommended weight gain during pregnancy.

Weight Gain During Pregnancy

Body Mass Index (BMI) Before Pregnancy	Rate of Weight Gain in the Second and Third Trimesters* (Pounds Per Week)	Recommended Total Weight Gain With a Single Fetus (in Pounds)	Recommended Total Weight Gain With Twins (in Pounds)
Less than 18.5 (underweight)	1.0 to 1.3	28 to 40	Not known
18.5 to 24.9 (normal weight)	0.8 to 1.0	25 to 35	37 to 54
25.0 to 29.9 (overweight)	0.5 to 0.7	15 to 25	31 to 50
30.0 and above (obese)	0.4 to 0.6	11 to 20	25 to 42

*Assumes a first-trimester weight gain between 1.1 and 4.4 pounds

Source:

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How can being overweight cause problems during pregnancy?

Excess weight during pregnancy is associated with several pregnancy and childbirth [complications](#), including

- [high blood pressure](#)
- [preeclampsia](#)
- [preterm](#) birth
- [gestational diabetes](#)

Obesity during pregnancy also increases the risk of:

- a larger than normal fetus ([macrosomia](#))

- birth injury
- cesarean birth
- birth defects, especially NTDs

What if I am overweight?

You and your ob-gyn should work together to develop a nutrition and exercise plan. If you are gaining less than what the guidelines suggest, and if your fetus is growing well, gaining less than the recommended guidelines can have benefits. If your fetus is not growing well, changes may need to be made to your diet and exercise plan.

Resources and Glossary

Resources

MyPlate

Health

www.nutrition.gov

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- Pre

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- MyPlate Plan: <https://www.myplate.gov/myplate-plan>

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Food Sources of Select Nutrients

Examples of foods that are good sources of important nutrients.

www.dietaryguidelines.gov/resources/2020-2025-dietary-guidelines-online-materials/food-sources-select-nutrients

Glossary

Anemia: Abnormally low levels of red blood cells in the bloodstream. Most cases are caused by iron deficiency (lack of iron).

Birth Defects: Physical problems that are present at birth.

Body Mass Index: A number calculated from height and weight. BMI is used to determine whether a person is underweight, normal weight, overweight, or obese.

Calories: Units of heat used to express the fuel or energy value of food.

Cesarean Birth: Birth of a fetus from the uterus through an incision (cut) made in the woman's abdomen.

Complications: Diseases or conditions that happen as a result of another disease or condition. An example is pneumonia that occurs as a result of the flu. A complication also can occur as a result of a condition, such as pregnancy. An example of a pregnancy complication is preterm labor.

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Neural Tube Defects: Birth defects that result from a problem in development of the brain, spinal cord, or their coverings.

Obstetrician–Gynecologist (Ob-Gyn): A doctor with special training and education in women's health.

Oxygen: An element that we breathe in to sustain life.

Placenta: An organ that provides nutrients to and takes waste away from the fetus.

Preeclampsia: A disorder that can occur during pregnancy or after childbirth in which there is high blood pressure and other signs of organ injury. These signs include an abnormal amount of protein in the urine, a low number of platelets, abnormal kidney or

liver function, pain over the upper abdomen, fluid in the lungs, or a severe headache or changes in vision.

Preterm: Less than 37 weeks of pregnancy.

Trimester: A 3-month time in pregnancy. It can be first, second, or third.

If you have further questions, contact your ob-gyn.

Don't have an ob-gyn? [Learn how to find a doctor near you.](#)

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