

Pregnancy

This Food Fact Sheet will help you to eat well before and during pregnancy to give your baby a good start in life.

Foods to choose

Healthy eating for pregnancy is no different from at any other time of your life. There is no need to eat for two, eating a varied diet made up from the four main food groups below is enough. Try to eat regularly - three meals per day are ideal to ensure you and your baby get all the nutrients needed.

Bread, rice, potatoes, pasta and other starchy foods including yam, chapatti - these foods give you energy and should make up the main part of each meal. Choose wholegrain options.

Fruit and vegetables - These provide vitamins, minerals and fibre. Aim to eat five or more portions per day. Fresh, frozen, tinned, dried and juiced all count.

Meat, fish, eggs, beans and other non-dairy sources of protein such as nuts, pulses and dhal, quorn, tofu - many of these also provide iron. Include foods from this group twice a day. Try to eat one portion of oily fish per week.

Milk and dairy foods - these give you calcium. Aim to have three portions of these foods per day. One portion is provided by one of the following: 200ml (one glass) milk, 150g yoghurt and 30g cheese. Choose low fat dairy products unless you are underweight. If you eat soya alternatives check they have calcium added. Other non-dairy foods containing some calcium include tahini, green leafy vegetables, broccoli, tofu, whitebait, beans, dahl, sardines, almonds, dried fruit.

Foods high in fat and/or sugar - keep foods from this food group such as cakes,

biscuits, chocolate to a minimum to prevent gaining too much weight.

Common questions

Is there financial help?

Yes. If you are on certain benefits you can register for Healthy Start from 10 weeks of pregnancy. You will receive a weekly voucher to swap for milk, fruit or vegetables.

Should I take folic acid?

Yes. To help prevent neural tube defects (NTD) you should take a 400mcg folic acid supplement daily before (when stopping contraception) and up to the 12th week of pregnancy, as well as eating a folate rich diet (green vegetables, fortified bread and cereals). If you have diabetes, had a previous NTD affected pregnancy or take drugs for epilepsy, you should take a 5mg dose of folic acid (only available from your GP).

Should I take other supplements?

Yes. 10mcg/day of vitamin D is recommended. This is to prevent rickets in your baby. Healthy Start vitamins, free for eligible women, contain vitamin D. Some NHS areas may provide free Healthy Start vitamins for all women or you may be able to obtain them from your GP, health visitor or midwife. If you are eating a balanced diet, as described above, you do not usually need to take any other supplements.

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

A good way to explain appropriate weight gain in pregnancy is 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 daily. Drink plenty of water daily.



How can I stop feeling sick?

Eat little and often through the day choosing mainly starchy foods such as toast or crackers. Drink fluids little and often through the day to prevent dehydration. Cold, bland, non-greasy foods are often better tolerated. You may find ginger-rich foods or drinks, or wrist acupressure travel bands help. In most cases this should have eased by 16 - 20 weeks.

I've got heartburn

Try eating small regular meals and snacks and

Foods to avoid or be careful with

Take extra care with the foods in the table below

Risk	Avoid	Take care
Salmonella	Raw and partially cooked eggs and dishes containing these e.g. homemade mayonnaise, mousses and ice-cream. Soft whipped ice-cream from machine. 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. Soft blue veined cheeses e.g. Danish Blue. All unpasteurised dairy products. All types of pate including vegetable.	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/week. Eat oily fish eg fresh tuna, salmon, mackerel, sardines, no more than twice/week.
Vitamin A	Multivitamin supplements containing excess retinol form of vitamin A. Fish liver oils containing more than 750mcg/day. Liver and liver products eg pate, faggots.	
Caffeine		Have no more than 200mg caffeine daily. Take care with coffee, tea, cola, high energy drinks and chocolate. No more than two mugs of coffee or three cups of tea a day.

avoid large meals. Avoid fatty, fried and spicy foods.

Alcohol in pregnancy.

It is unknown what level of alcohol is safe in pregnancy. Alcohol is best avoided throughout pregnancy - especially if planning a pregnancy and during the first three months, because of the increased risk of miscarriage.

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 do choose to have alcohol, limit it to one or two units once or twice a week and don't get drunk or binge drink. (One UK unit is equal to: half a pint of beer, lager or cider at 3.5% alcohol by volume [ABV] [you can find this on the label], single measure [25ml] of spirit, such as whisky, gin, rum or vodka, at 40% ABV or half a standard [175ml] glass of wine at 11.5% ABV.)

If you have any concerns about alcohol consumption in early pregnancy, speak to your midwife.

Summary

Eating a varied diet from the four main food groups is enough to keep you and your unborn baby healthy. Alongside taking a daily supplement of 400mcg folic acid and 10mcg vitamin D, you should avoid alcohol and certain foods (listed in the table) to ensure your little one has the best start in life.

Further information: Food Fact Sheets on other topics including Alcohol, Healthy Eating and Supplements are available at www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts

Useful links include:

www.nhs.uk/Pregnancy

www.eatwell.gov.uk www.healthystart.nhs.uk

www.nhs.uk/Conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/pages/alcohol-medicines-drugs-pregnant.aspx

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This Food Fact Sheet and others are available to download free of charge at www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts

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The information sources used to develop this fact sheet are available at www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts

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