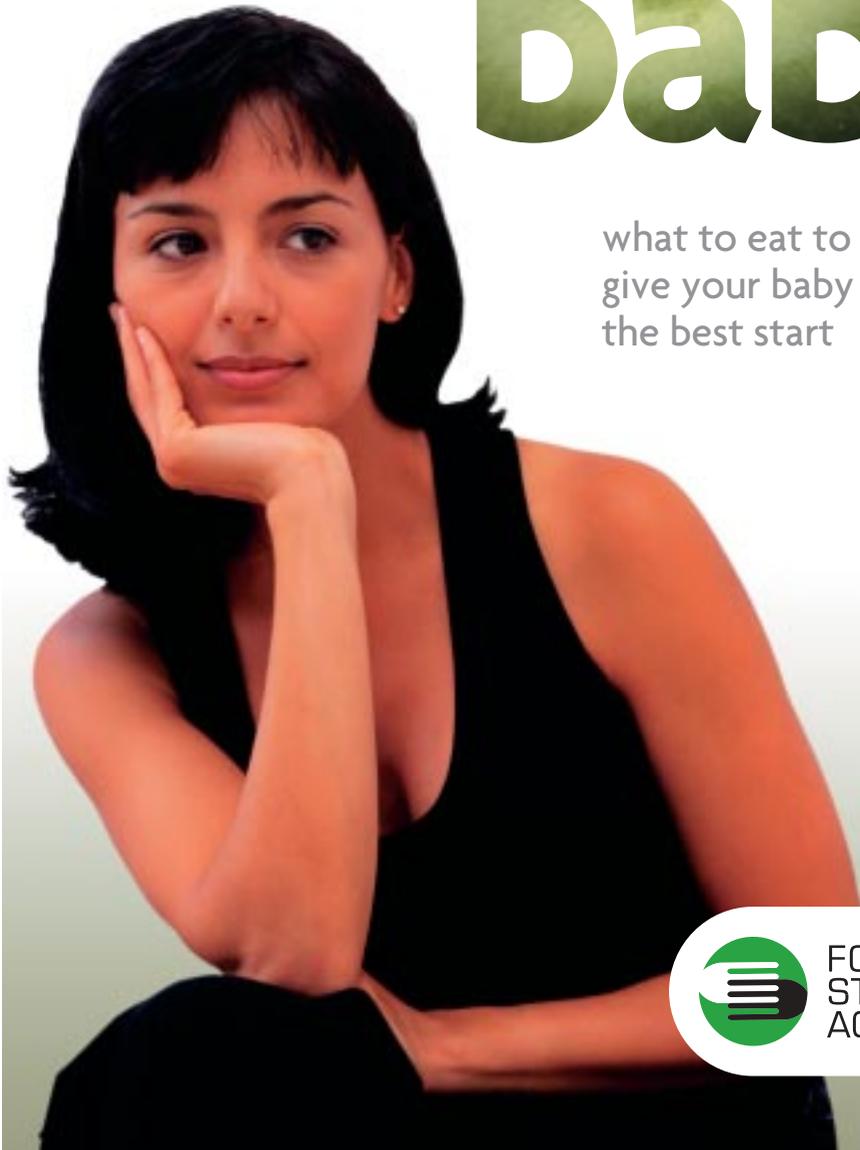


Healthy eating

thinking of having a

baby

what to eat to
give your baby
the best start



FOOD
STANDARDS
AGENCY

If you're trying for a baby, this booklet contains practical food advice to help you make healthy choices and give your baby the best start in life.

Q What should I be eating?

A A healthy balanced diet is an important part of a healthy lifestyle at any time, but particularly when you're planning a pregnancy.

It's important to try to eat a variety of foods including:

- plenty of fruit and vegetables (fresh, frozen, tinned, dried or a glass of juice) – aim for at least five portions a day
- plenty of starchy foods, such as bread, pasta, rice and potatoes – choose wholegrain options when you can
- sources of protein, such as lean meat and chicken, fish, eggs and pulses (such as beans and lentils). These are also good sources of iron (see page 2). Try to eat fish at least twice a week including some oily fish, such as salmon, mackerel, sardines and trout. But don't have more than two portions of oily fish a week
- dairy foods, such as milk, cheese and yoghurt, which contain calcium



Q Do I need extra iron?

- A Pregnant women can become deficient in iron, so when you're trying to get pregnant it's a good idea to choose plenty of iron-rich foods to build up your iron stores. Try to have some food or drink containing vitamin C, such as a glass of fruit juice, at the same time as an iron-rich meal because this will help your body to absorb the iron.



Good sources of iron

- red meat
- pulses
- bread
- green vegetables
- fortified breakfast cereals

Although liver also contains lots of iron, you should avoid eating it while you're pregnant or trying to become pregnant. (See **Is there any food I should avoid?** below.)

Q Is there any food I should avoid?

- A Make sure you don't have too much vitamin A. This means you should avoid eating liver and liver products such as pâté, and you should avoid taking supplements containing vitamin A or fish liver oil. You need some vitamin A, but if you have too much during pregnancy, this could harm your baby. Ask your GP or midwife if you would like more information.



You should also avoid eating shark, swordfish and marlin and limit the amount of tuna you eat. Don't eat more than one tuna steak a week (weighing about 140g cooked or 170g raw) or two medium-size cans of tuna a week (with a drained weight of about 140g per can). For canned tuna, this means about six rounds of tuna sandwiches or three tuna salads. This is because of the levels of mercury in these fish. At high levels, mercury can harm a baby's developing nervous system.

Your baby could be at a higher risk of developing a nut allergy if you, the baby's father, brothers or sisters have certain conditions such as hayfever, asthma and/or eczema. If you think your baby would be in this higher-risk group, you may wish to avoid eating peanuts and peanut products when you're trying to get pregnant and when you have become pregnant.

It's a good idea to cut down on foods such as cakes and biscuits because these are high in fat and sugar. This can help you keep your weight under control.

Some healthier light meals and snacks

- sandwiches or pitta bread filled with chicken or cottage cheese
- low-fat yoghurts
- vegetable and bean soups
- fruit – fresh, canned in juice or dried fruit such as raisins



Q Do I need any vitamin supplements?

- A When you're trying to get pregnant you should take a 400 microgram (mcg) folic acid supplement each day. Aim to take these supplements from the time you stop using contraception until the 12th week of pregnancy.

You should also try to eat foods containing folate – the natural form of folic acid – such as green vegetables and brown rice, as well as fortified bread and breakfast cereals.

Folic acid has been shown to reduce the risk of neural tube defects such as spina bifida. If you would like to take your folic acid in a supplement that contains other vitamins, make sure it contains 400 mcg folic acid and doesn't contain vitamin A or fish liver oil.

If you have already had a pregnancy affected by a neural tube defect, consult your GP for advice.

Q Do I need to cut out alcohol?

- A You should drink no more than 1 or 2 units of alcohol, once or twice a week. A unit is half a pint of ordinary-strength beer, lager or cider, a small glass of wine, or a single 25 ml measure of spirits.

Q Where can I get more information?

- A If you would like more information on planning a pregnancy, speak to your GP or health visitor, or contact your local health promotion unit.

You might also be interested in the booklets *Eating while you are pregnant*, *Eating for breastfeeding* and *Feeding your baby*, available from Food Standards Agency Publications. See the back cover for information about ordering.

You can find out more about food at www.food.gov.uk/eatwell





www.food.gov.uk/tryingforababy

