

## Healthy Eating Guidelines for Pregnancy

Eating well during your pregnancy gives your baby healthy nutrients to grow and develop. Some nutrients, like folate (folic acid), iron, calcium and omega-3 fats, are particularly important during pregnancy. Following Canada's Food Guide will provide the nutrition building blocks you need for a healthy pregnancy.



### Steps you can take

To meet your energy (calorie) needs during pregnancy:

- | Follow [Canada's Food Guide](#) for your age group.
- | During the second and third trimesters, add two to three additional Food Guide Servings each day. Enjoy them with meals, or try [an extra snack](#) such as:
  - | an apple and cheese
  - | yogurt and fresh fruit
  - | hummus with vegetable sticks
- | Get your energy from healthy foods rather than foods high in fat, salt or sugar like chips, salted pretzels, candy, sweetened beverages, cakes and cookies.

Visit [www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide](http://www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide) for serving size examples and meal and snack ideas.

To meet your folate (folic acid) needs, especially in the 1<sup>st</sup> trimester:

- | Take a daily multivitamin that has 0.4 mg (400 mcg) of folic acid.
  - | Do not take more than 1 mg (1000 mcg) per day.
- | Choose high folate foods every day such as:
  - | lentils and dried beans like chickpeas, black, navy and pinto beans
  - | edamame

- | sunflower seeds and peanuts
- | vegetables like broccoli, asparagus, okra, spinach, Brussels sprouts, collards and mustard greens
- | some fruits like papayas and avocados
- | enriched pasta

Folic acid is a B vitamin that helps your body make new cells. Folate is found naturally in some foods. Folic acid is a man-made form of folate. It can be hard to get enough from food alone, so you need to take a folic acid supplement before and during pregnancy, as well as afterward. Getting enough folate (folic acid) reduces the risk of a birth defect that affects the brain and spinal cord, called a neural tube defect.

To meet your iron needs throughout pregnancy:

- | Choose food sources of iron such as:
  - | cooked mussels, clams and oysters
  - | beef and lamb
  - | cooked organ meats
    - n Liver and liver products (e.g. liverwurst spread and liver sausages) are also high in vitamin A. Too much vitamin A may cause birth defects, especially during the first trimester. The safest choice is to limit these foods during pregnancy. If you choose to eat liver products, have no more than 75g (2 ½ ounces) per week.
  - | chicken and fish
  - | pumpkin seeds and cashew, pine and hazel nuts\*
  - | dried beans, peas and lentils\*
  - | fortified whole grain cereals\*
  - | dark leafy greens like spinach and swiss chard\*

\*Eat these iron rich foods with foods that are sources of vitamin C, like kiwi fruit, citrus or tropical fruit, or bell peppers to help iron absorption.

- | Take a daily multivitamin that has 16-20 mg of iron.
  - | Some women may need more. Talk to your healthcare provider about the amount of iron you need.

Iron helps build new red blood cells and helps them carry oxygen. During pregnancy, the amount of blood you have increases to meet the needs of both you and your baby. The iron you eat while pregnant will help your baby store enough for when she is born.

To meet your calcium needs, include 2 servings of milk and alternatives every day:

- | 250 mL (1 cup) of 1% or skim milk or fortified soy beverage.
- | 50 g of lower fat cheese (less than 20% M.F.)
- | 175 g (3/4 cup) of yogurt or kefir

Calcium helps teeth, bones, the heart, nerves and muscles develop. Without enough calcium from your diet, calcium is taken from your bones to help your baby develop. Having enough calcium throughout your pregnancy meets the needs of both you and your baby.

To meet your omega-3 fat needs:

- | Eat at least 2 servings (150 g) per week of fatty fish like salmon, mackerel or herring.
  - | See the Additional Resources for information about choosing fish that is lower in mercury.
- | Choose walnuts, ground flax seeds, chia seeds, soy products and canola oil more often.
- | Some foods may be fortified with omega-3 fats. Read the label on foods like margarine, eggs, yogurt, juice and soy beverage.

Omega-3 fats are used for your baby's brain and eye development. Omega-3 fats include alpha linolenic acid (ALA), EPA and DHA. ALA is an essential fat found in plant sources like nuts, seeds and soy. ALA is used to make EPA and DHA. EPA and DHA are found in only a few animal-based foods such as fish. To meet your omega-3 needs, choose a variety of these omega-3 sources.

Other considerations for a healthy pregnancy:

- | Enjoy regular physical activity. Check with your doctor before beginning a new exercise program.
- | Some foods, like meat, fish, poultry and seafood may have bacteria that, if the meat is not properly cooked, can harm you or your growing baby. See the Additional Resources for specific food safety information.
- | Avoid alcohol during pregnancy.
- | You can have caffeine in moderation. Limit to 300 mg per day—about 500 mL (2 cups) of coffee or 1000 mL (4 cups) or tea per day.
- | Herbal supplements are not recommended during pregnancy. When limited to 3 cups per day, the following herbs taken as herbal tea are considered to be safe:
  - | bitter orange/orange peel
  - | echinacea
  - | peppermint
  - | red raspberry leaf
  - | rose hip
  - | rosemary
- | Cyclamate is not recommended during pregnancy. All other sugar substitutes are approved for use during pregnancy in moderate amounts. Be sure that foods made with these sweeteners do not replace more nutritious foods or drinks.
- | If you are overweight or underweight, your nutrition needs may be different. Discuss this with your doctor who may refer you to a registered dietitian.
- | If you have nausea, vomiting, heartburn or constipation during pregnancy that is keeping you from eating, ask your family doctor or obstetrician for help.
- | If you are having twins or triplets, the healthy eating information in this handout also applies to you. You may however, have higher nutrient needs. Talk with your healthcare provider to find out the amount that is right for you.



## Additional Resources

HealthLinkBC File #68m Healthy Eating: Guidelines for Eating Fish with Higher Mercury Levels [www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthfiles/hfile68m.stm](http://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthfiles/hfile68m.stm)

Dietitian Services Fact Sheets available by mail (call 8-1-1) or at [www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthyeating](http://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthyeating):

- Healthy Eating Guidelines for Food Safety During Pregnancy [www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthyeating/food-safety-pregnancy.html](http://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthyeating/food-safety-pregnancy.html)

Health Canada's, "The Sensible guide to a Healthy Pregnancy" [www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hp-gs/guide-eng.php](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hp-gs/guide-eng.php) or 1-800-622-6232

*These resources are provided as sources of additional information believed to be reliable and accurate at the time of publication and should not be considered an endorsement of any information, service, product or company.*



## Notes

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Dietitian Services at HealthLinkBC (formerly Dial-A-Dietitian), providing free nutrition information and resources for BC residents and health professionals. Go to [www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthyeating](http://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthyeating) or call 8-1-1 (anywhere in BC). Interpreters are available in over 130 languages.