

Nutrition Matters

Nutrition Services, Community and Health Services

Healthy eating for pregnancy

In this booklet:

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This booklet is part of the *Healthy Beginnings* series from York Region Community and Health Services.



Pregnancy is a great time to make healthy choices that will benefit both you and your growing baby. This booklet was written to give pregnant women practical information on healthy eating during pregnancy.

Some women have special needs during pregnancy. Speak to your doctor, midwife or registered dietitian if you:

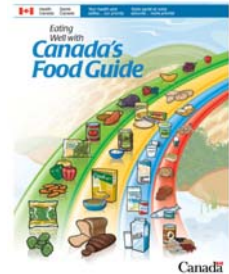
- Are younger than 18 or older than 35
- Were not at a healthy weight before pregnancy
- Dieted a lot before getting pregnant
- Are vegetarian
- Avoid milk and alternatives
- Are gaining too much or too little weight
- Feel sick and have trouble eating
- Follow a special diet due to food allergies, diabetes, digestive problems or other medical conditions

Making healthy food choices before or during pregnancy will help you:

- Look and feel better
- Promote healthy weight gain
- Meet your nutritional needs
- Lower the chance of health problems, such as low iron or high blood pressure

Use Canada's Food Guide to help you make healthy food choices.

You will need extra calories during the second and third trimesters of your pregnancy. Aim for an extra two to three Food Guide servings each day. For example, you may have an extra snack of an apple and cheese or you may have a glass of milk and half a peanut butter sandwich.



Canada's Food Guide: Recommended servings for women ages 19-50		
Food group	Food Guide Servings per day*	Examples of one Food Guide Serving
Vegetables and Fruit	7-8	1 medium vegetable or fruit ½ cup (125 mL) fresh, frozen or canned vegetables or fruit ½ cup (125 mL) cooked leafy vegetables 1 cup (250 mL) of raw leafy vegetables ½ cup (125 mL) 100% juice
Grain Products	6-7	1 slice (35 g) of bread ½ bagel (45 g), pita or tortilla (35 g) ½ cup (125 mL) cooked rice or pasta ¾ cup (175 mL) hot cereal 30 g cold cereal
Milk and Alternatives	2	1 cup (250 mL) milk or fortified soy beverage ¾ cup (175 mL) yogurt 50 g (1 ½ oz) cheese
Meat and Alternatives	2	75 g (2 ½ oz) of fish, shellfish, poultry, or lean meat ¾ cup (175 mL) cooked legumes 2 eggs ¾ cup (150 g) tofu 2 tbsp (30 mL) peanut butter ¼ cup (60 mL) nuts and seeds
Oils and Fats	2-3 Tbsp (30-45 mL)	oil used for cooking, salad dressings, margarine and mayonnaise
*During the 2nd and 3rd trimesters, include an extra 2-3 Food Guide Servings each day.		

Important nutrients

Health Canada recommends all women of childbearing age take a multivitamin that includes 0.4 mg of folic acid and 16-20 mg of iron. Women who are at higher risk for neural tube defects need more folic acid. Talk to your health care provider about choosing a multivitamin.

While you are pregnant, you and your baby share the food you eat. The following are important nutrients while you are pregnant.

Folate (folic acid)

This vitamin is needed for the normal development of your baby's spine, brain and skull, especially during the first four weeks of pregnancy. Eat folate-rich foods each day, along with your multivitamin. Folate-rich foods include: beans, peas, lentils, asparagus, spinach, romaine lettuce, oranges, broccoli, sunflower seeds, wheat germ, peanuts, walnuts and folic acid enriched grain products such as enriched breakfast cereals and pasta.

Iron

Iron helps build healthy blood for you and your baby. You need extra iron in your diet during pregnancy (at least 27 mg per day). A healthy diet along with your multivitamin can lower your chance of premature delivery or low birth-weight as well as make sure your baby has enough iron stores for the first six months of life. Sources include red meat, dark poultry, beans, lentils, tofu, most hot and cold cereal, enriched breads and pasta.

To improve the way your body absorbs iron:

- Include a source of vitamin C such as fruit or vegetables, or 100% fruit juice with meals or snacks
- Avoid coffee and tea at or close to meals
- If you take supplements or antacids containing calcium, avoid taking them at mealtime or with your multivitamin

Calcium and vitamin D

You need both calcium and vitamin D to build strong bones and teeth for your baby. In Canada, vitamin D is added to all fluid milk. Pregnant women should drink two cups (500 mL) of milk or fortified soy beverage each day.



It is also important to include other calcium-rich foods and beverages in your diet such as yogurt*, cheese, calcium-fortified orange juice, bok choy, broccoli, canned salmon or sardines with the bones,** almonds, sunflower seeds and tofu set with calcium. Skim milk powder** can also be added to foods like soups or smoothies to increase calcium and vitamin D content.

*Check yogurt labels for vitamin D

**Contains both calcium and vitamin D

Essential fatty acids

Essential fatty acids such as linoleic and linolenic acids, as well as arachidonic acid (AA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA), play a role in your baby's brain and eye development.

The best way to get these healthy fats is to include fish in your diet. Health Canada recommends eating two Food Guide Servings each week of fish that are high in healthy fats and low in mercury. These include salmon, mackerel, sardines, herring, anchovies, arctic char, and rainbow trout. Other sources include vegetable oils (e.g., canola and soybean) some nuts and eggs. Certain brands of milk and yogurt are fortified, although often in small amounts.

If you do not eat or are allergic to fish and would like to take a supplement such as DHA, talk to your health care provider. Some pregnant women should not take these types of supplements.

Weight gain

The amount of weight gain during pregnancy depends on your Body Mass Index (BMI) before you became pregnant. Your BMI is a number based on your weight and height.

$$\text{BMI} = \text{weight (kg)} / \text{height (m)}^2$$

Visit www.active2010.ca to calculate your pre-pregnancy BMI (go to “Activity tools”).

BMI	Recommended weight gain during pregnancy	
	lbs	kg
Less than 18.5	28-40	13-18
18.5-24.9	25-35	11-16
25-29.9	15-25	7-11
More than 30	11-20	5-9

If you are pregnant with more than one baby, consult with your health care provider on how much weight you should gain.

The following is a chart showing the distribution of weight gain for a person with a pre-pregnancy BMI of 18.5-24.9:

Location of weight gain	Weight gain	
	lbs	kg
Baby	6-8	2.7-3.5
Blood	4	1.8
Breasts	2-3	1-1.5
Energy stored as fat	5-8	2.3-3.5
Extra fluids	2-3	1-1.5
Placenta and amniotic fluid	4-6	1.8-2.7
Uterus	2-3	1-1.5
Total weight gain	25-35	11.5-16

Weight gain is slow during the first trimester, about 1-4.4 lbs (0.5-2 kg) total. During the second and third trimesters, weight gain is about ½-1 lb (¼ - ½ kg) per week. Follow a healthy eating pattern and allow your appetite to guide your food intake. See your doctor right away if you gain or lose weight suddenly.

Body image

In our society, a woman’s appearance is of much focus and discussion. For some women, it may be difficult to accept body changes during pregnancy. To help accept the changes in your body:

- Talk to others and attend prenatal classes
- Choose a health care provider you feel comfortable with
- Wear comfortable clothes and shoes
- Take time for yourself

Pregnancy is not a time to diet or restrict your food intake. Once you have your baby, studies have shown breastfeeding may help to lose weight gained during pregnancy more easily.

Foods to avoid

Foods that may cause food-borne illnesses

Food-borne illnesses such as Listeria can cause serious effects during pregnancy, including miscarriage. To reduce your risk, avoid the following:

- All raw sprouts
- Unpasteurized milk products or juice, such as unpasteurized apple cider
- Soft cheeses such as Brie, Camembert, feta and blue-veined cheeses, if they are made from unpasteurized milk
- Raw or undercooked eggs
- Refrigerated pâté and meat spreads
- Refrigerated smoked seafood and fish
- Hot dogs and deli meats — unless you cook them to the point of steaming
- Raw fish and shellfish

Safe food handling is very important during pregnancy. To reduce your risk of getting sick, make sure you:

- Wash your hands often
- Wash raw vegetables and fruit well
- Use separate utensils for raw and cooked foods

- Make sure meat, poultry and seafood are cooked to safe temperatures by using a meat thermometer
- Follow “best before” dates

Fish containing high levels of mercury

Fish is an excellent source of protein and healthy fats; however, nearly all fish and shellfish contain mercury. Some types are of concern because they contain much higher levels than others.

Exposure to high amounts of mercury can be harmful, especially for pregnant women and developing babies. Fetuses and infants exposed to high levels of mercury may experience delays in walking, talking, memory and attention span. The following chart shows how much tuna can be eaten during pregnancy:

Type of tuna	Recommendations during pregnancy
Fresh or frozen	Less than 2½ oz (75 g) per month
OR	
Canned white or Albacore	5-10 oz (150-300 g) per week*
OR	
Canned light	Up to 10 oz (300 g) per week*

* 2½ oz or 75 g is one Food Guide serving

Some fish have low levels of mercury and can be eaten often. This includes salmon, rainbow trout, tilapia, smelt, sardines and others. For more information on fish safety, see York Region Community and Health Services handout, *A Guide to Eating Fish for women, children and families*.

Liver

Although liver is an excellent source of iron, the high vitamin A amount can be unsafe for your baby. If you eat liver, only have one Food Guide serving (2½ oz or 75 g) at a time no more than once every two weeks.

Artificial sweeteners

If you choose to use artificial sweeteners during pregnancy **avoid**:

- Saccharin (e.g., Hermetas®)
- Cyclamates (e.g., Sucaryl®, Sugar Twin®, Sweet’N Low®)

Although these artificial sweeteners can be purchased as tabletop sweeteners, they cannot be added to foods sold in Canada due to health-related concerns.

Safe artificial sweeteners include:

- Sucralose (e.g., Splenda®)
- Aspartame (e.g., Equal®, NutraSweet®)
- Acesulfame-potassium

Try to limit foods and beverages with artificial sweeteners. Instead, choose more nutritious foods and beverages.

Caffeine

Health Canada recommends limiting total caffeine intake to no more than 300 mg per day while pregnant. Listed are the approximate caffeine amounts of some food and beverages.

Food/Beverage	Quantity	Caffeine (mg)
Candy, sweet chocolate	2 oz (56 g)	40
Coffee, filter drip	8 oz (250 mL)	180
Coffee, instant	8 oz (250 mL)	75-105
Cola, diet or regular	1 can (355 mL)	35-50
Tea	8 oz (250 mL)	50

Other sources of caffeine are guarana and yerba mate, both found in products such as energy drinks. Read the ingredient list to see if these products are present.

Herbal teas

At this time, there is not enough scientific information about the safety of various herbs and herbal products during pregnancy. Chamomile tea, for example, has been shown to have adverse effects on the uterus and should be avoided during pregnancy.

The following herbal teas are considered safe during pregnancy if taken in moderation – no more than 2-3 cups per day:

- Citrus peel
- Linden flower*
- Ginger
- Orange peel
- Lemon balm
- Rose hip

*Not recommended for people with heart conditions

Alcohol

There is no known safe amount or safe time to drink alcohol during pregnancy. Drinking alcohol during pregnancy can cause permanent birth defects and brain damage.

Many pregnancies are not planned. Having a small amount of alcohol before you knew you were pregnant is not likely to harm your baby. If you need help to stop drinking during pregnancy, speak to your doctor or call Motherisk at 1-877-327-4636.

Pregnancy-related health concerns

Pregnancy can present other health concerns that you can manage by making small changes. York Region Community and Health Services, *Coping with pregnancy discomforts*, is a handout that provides detailed suggestions on how to manage nausea/vomiting, heartburn and constipation.

Gestational diabetes

Gestational diabetes is a form of diabetes during pregnancy. High blood sugar levels can be harmful for you and your baby. If you are diagnosed with gestational diabetes, you will need to meet with a health professional to learn how to manage your blood sugar levels.

Oral health

Hormone changes can cause swollen, bleeding gums (pregnancy gingivitis). The risk of having a premature or low birth-weight baby may be reduced if you have healthy gums and teeth. To help keep them healthy:

- Brush twice a day
- Floss daily
- If you vomit, rinse your mouth with water or a fluoride mouth rinse to help protect your teeth from stomach acids



Frequently asked questions

Question: I have cravings for salty and sweet foods. Is this harmful?

There is no need to cut out sugary and salty foods completely. All foods can fit into a healthy diet. If you have a sweet dessert or a salty snack, try to balance it with healthy food choices at other meals or snacks.

Question: Will avoiding certain foods during pregnancy reduce the risk of food allergies for my baby?

Research shows that avoiding certain foods during pregnancy will not prevent allergies in babies. If you avoid foods during pregnancy, your health and the growth of your baby may suffer because of a potential lack of nutrients

Question: Since I feel tired, I am not interested in cooking meals. How can I still eat healthy?

Although it is common to feel tired during pregnancy, it is still important you eat a healthy diet. As long as your meals have at least three different food groups and your snacks have at least two different food groups, you will likely meet your nutritional needs. Drink low-fat milk or 100% fruit juice with your meals and snacks instead of less nutritious choices like sweetened iced tea, cola or fruit flavoured beverages. Water is also a good beverage choice.

Quick and easy meal ideas:

- Peanut butter and banana sandwich on whole wheat bread
- Whole wheat pita and baby carrots dipped in hummus
- Bowl of high fibre cereal with low-fat milk and a piece of fruit
- Cold pasta mixed with leftover diced chicken and vegetables, topped with shredded cheese
- Chicken, egg, canned salmon or “light” tuna salad sandwiches, or spread on whole wheat crackers, or scooped with vegetables. Add shredded or sliced cheese.

Quick and easy snack ideas:

- Whole wheat crackers and lower-fat cheese
- Smoothie (made with yogurt, fruit and milk)
- Cut up fruit dipped in yogurt
- Mixture of various nuts and dried fruit
- Peanut butter spread on a banana
- Yogurt and mix with granola cereal
- Sliced vegetable and mini breadsticks with a low-fat dip or hummus

Where to get more information

Health Connection

York Region
Community and
Health Services
Health



Connection is a free and confidential link to public health services and information in York Region. You can speak to a public health nurse about your pregnancy and find out information about the prenatal and parenting classes that are offered, including All Babies Count (ABC) program, Special Delivery Club and Healthy Babies Healthy Children (HBHC). Call York Region Community and Health Services *Health Connection* at 1-800-361-5653.

Nutrition information on the Web

There are many resources available from York Region Community and Health Services. Visit www.york.ca/nutrition to learn more about nutrition before, during and after pregnancy or to get a copy of any of the following fact sheets:



- *A guide to eating fish for women, children and families*
- *Calcium – The non-dairy way*
- *Canada’s Food Guide*
- *Clarifying the caffeine controversy*
- *Coping with pregnancy discomforts*
- *Food allergies and your baby*
- *Food safety during pregnancy*
- *Iron works*
- *Omega-3 fat: Reel in the benefits!*
- *Pregnant or breastfeeding? Get the facts on herbal teas and products*
- *Women, folic acid and babies: what’s the link?*

Additional pregnancy information online

- Best Start: www.beststart.org
- EatRight Ontario: www.eatrightontario.ca
- Government of Canada: www.healthycanadians.ca
- Motherisk: www.motherisk.org
- Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada: www.sogc.org

Additional information by phone

- EatRight Ontario (to speak to a registered dietitian): 1-877-510-5102
- Motherisk:
416-813-6780 Main line
1-877-327-4636 Alcohol and substance
1-800-436-8477 Morning sickness

Sample menu for the second and third trimester

Don't forget that 2-3 extra *Food Guide Servings* are needed during the second and third trimesters. In this meal plan, one extra serving from each of the Grain Products, Milk and Alternatives and Meat and Alternatives group has been added.

Menu	Vegetables and Fruit	Grain Products	Milk and Alternatives	Meat and Alternatives	Oils and Fats
Breakfast 2 slices of whole grain toast 2 tbsp peanut butter ½ cup orange juice	✓	✓✓		✓	
Snack 1 small bran muffin 1 cup milk		✓	✓		
Lunch Salmon salad sandwich (½ can salmon mixed with 1 Tbsp mayonnaise spread on 2 slices of whole grain bread) ½ cup baby carrots 1 apple	✓ ✓	✓✓		✓	1 tbsp
Snack ¾ cup yogurt 1 banana	✓		✓		
Dinner 1 small grilled chicken breast 1 cup brown rice 1 cup cooked mixed vegetables 1 cup green salad 2 tbsp of dressing	✓✓ ✓	✓✓		✓	2 tbsp
Snack ¾ cup whole grain cereal 1 cup milk ½ cup berries	✓	✓	✓		
Total Servings	8	8	3	3	3 tbsp
Canada's Food Guide Recommendation (19-50 years of age)	7-8	6-7	2	2	2-3 tbsp

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