

Build a Healthy Eating Routine When You're Pregnant or Breastfeeding

When you're pregnant or breastfeeding, it's important to give yourself and your baby the nutrition needed to grow and thrive.

Follow these tips to eat healthy during pregnancy and breastfeeding.



Choose a mix of healthy foods

There are lots of healthy choices in each food group! Choose a variety of foods you enjoy, including:



Whole fruits — like apples, berries, oranges, mangos, and bananas



Veggies — like broccoli, sweet potatoes, beets, okra, spinach, peppers, black beans, edamame, and jicama



Whole grains — like brown rice, millet, oatmeal, bulgur, whole-wheat bread, and pasta



Protein foods — like lean meats and chicken, eggs, seafood, beans and lentils, nuts and seeds, and tofu



Low-fat or fat-free dairy — like milk, yogurt, cheese, lactose-free dairy, and fortified soy beverages (soy milk) or soy yogurt



Oils — like vegetable oil, olive oil, and oils in foods like seafood, avocado, and nuts



It's normal to crave or dislike certain foods during pregnancy — and the foods listed here are only a few examples of healthy choices. You can find foods that work for you at [DietaryGuidelines.gov/sites/default/files/2020-12/DGA_2020-2025_CustomizingTheDietaryGuidelines.pdf](https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/sites/default/files/2020-12/DGA_2020-2025_CustomizingTheDietaryGuidelines.pdf).



Get key nutrients from foods and supplements

During pregnancy, you need more of certain nutrients to keep you and your baby healthy. It's best to get these nutrients mostly from foods and drinks, but it may be hard to get enough. That's why most doctors also recommend a **daily prenatal supplement** (also known as a prenatal vitamin). Ask your doctor which one is right for you.

You may also need a daily supplement when you're breastfeeding, but prenatal vitamins may not be the right choice for breastfeeding. Ask your doctor if you need a supplement — and if so, which one is right for you.

Focus on 4 key nutrients



Folic acid (a type of **folate** added to foods and supplements) is key for preventing serious problems with your baby's brain and spine. Doctors recommend that you start taking folic acid before you get pregnant. Before and during pregnancy, take a daily supplement with 400 to 800 micrograms of folic acid — check the label on your prenatal supplement to make sure it has enough. It's also important to get enough folate from foods like:

- Dark green veggies — like spinach and broccoli
- Beans, peas, and lentils — like black-eyed peas and kidney beans



Iron helps your baby grow and develop normally. Eat these foods to get enough iron:

- Lean meats, poultry, and some seafood — like sirloin steak and sardines
- Dark green veggies — like spinach and swiss chard
- Beans, peas, and lentils — like soybeans and lima beans



Iodine is important for your baby's brain development — and prenatal supplements may not have enough. If you add salt to your food, make sure it's iodized salt (salt with added iodine). Eat these foods to get enough iodine:

- Seafood — like cod, tuna, and shrimp
- Low-fat or fat-free dairy — like milk, yogurt, and cheese
- Eggs



Choline is a nutrient that helps your baby's brain and spine develop — and prenatal supplements may not have enough. Eat these foods to get enough choline:

- Eggs
- Lean meats, poultry, and seafood — like beef, chicken breast, and cod
- Beans, peas, and lentils — like white beans and kidney beans

You can also get some key nutrients from fortified and enriched foods. For example, if you eat refined grains like white bread or pasta, choose **enriched** options with added iron and folic acid.

Is it safe to eat seafood?

Many types of seafood are safe to eat while you're pregnant or breastfeeding — and seafood is good for your baby's brain development. Aim to **eat 8 to 12 ounces of seafood a week**. Just make sure to choose fish and shellfish that are low in mercury. And always cook seafood to 145 degrees Fahrenheit (°F) when you're pregnant.

Learn how to choose safe seafood at [fda.gov/food/consumers/advice-about-eating-fish](https://www.fda.gov/food/consumers/advice-about-eating-fish).



Cut down on added sugars, saturated fat, and sodium

Check the Nutrition Facts label to choose foods with less of these 3 things:



Added sugars include sugars that are added to foods and drinks, foods packaged as sweeteners (such as table sugar), and sugars from syrups and honey. Choose water instead of sugary drinks and limit sweet treats like cake, cookies, and candy.



Saturated fat is higher in foods from animal sources like butter, cheese, whole milk, and fatty meats like ribs and sausage. It's also in some plant foods like coconut oil and palm oil. Choose foods with unsaturated fats instead — like seafood, avocados, nuts and seeds, and olive oil.



Sodium comes from salt — and most of the sodium we eat comes from packaged foods and restaurant meals. Try cooking more at home and flavoring foods with herbs and spices instead of salt.



What about alcohol?

If you're pregnant or trying to get pregnant, **don't drink alcohol at all** — it's not safe for your baby.

When you're breastfeeding, it's still safer not to drink because alcohol can pass to your baby in breast milk. Having 1 drink or less in a day isn't known to be harmful, especially if you wait at least 2 hours to breastfeed or pump. If you're thinking about drinking while breastfeeding, talk with your doctor first.

Find out how many calories you need

You need to eat more during the second and third trimesters of pregnancy and while you're breastfeeding. After all, you're giving your baby the nutrition they need to grow! And of course you'll gain weight when you're pregnant – but keeping your weight gain in a healthy range can help keep you and your baby healthy.

To find out how many calories you need at each stage of pregnancy and breastfeeding, use the MyPlate Plan tool at [MyPlate.gov/MyPlate-Plan](https://www.MyPlate.gov/MyPlate-Plan). Then work with your doctor to find a healthy eating routine that works for you.

Learn more about healthy weight gain during pregnancy at [cdc.gov/ReproductiveHealth/MaternalInfantHealth/Pregnancy-Weight-Gain.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/ReproductiveHealth/MaternalInfantHealth/Pregnancy-Weight-Gain.htm).



| Nutrition Facts | |
|--|----------------------|
| 8 servings per container | |
| Serving size | 2/3 cup (55g) |
| Amount per serving | |
| Calories | 230 |
| % Daily Value* | |
| Total Fat 8g | 10% |
| Saturated Fat 1g | 5% |
| Trans Fat 0g | |
| Cholesterol 0mg | 0% |
| Sodium 160mg | 7% |
| Total Carbohydrate 37g | 13% |
| Dietary Fiber 4g | 14% |
| Total Sugars 12g | |
| Includes 10g Added Sugars | 20% |
| Protein 3g | |
| Vitamin D 2mcg | 10% |
| Calcium 260mg | 20% |
| Iron 8mg | 45% |
| Potassium 235mg | 6% |
| <small>* The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.</small> | |

Check the label

The Nutrition Facts label can help you make healthier choices. Look for this key info:

- Serving size – if you eat more than 1 serving, you'll get more of everything on the label
- Calories – keep in mind how many calories you need each day, and how many are in 1 serving

Then look at the % Daily Values:

- 5% or less is **low** – try to choose foods low in added sugars, saturated fat, and sodium
- 20% or more is **high** – try to choose foods high in fiber, calcium, potassium, iron, and vitamin D

Follow food safety tips during pregnancy

When you're pregnant, you and your baby are at higher risk for getting sick from germs that may be in certain foods. Follow these food safety tips to keep you and your baby healthy:

- Make sure milk and juice say "pasteurized" on the label — never drink raw (unpasteurized) milk or juice
- If you eat soft cheeses like brie and feta, make sure the label says they're made with pasteurized milk
- Don't eat raw sprouts, which can have germs that are hard to wash off
- Cook seafood, meat, poultry, and eggs to safe temperatures — you can find safe cooking temperatures at [FoodSafety.gov/food-safety-charts/safe-minimum-cooking-temperature](https://www.foodsafety.gov/food-safety-charts/safe-minimum-cooking-temperature)
- If you eat deli meat or hot dogs, heat them to steaming hot (165 °F)



What about caffeine?

Ask your doctor if caffeine is safe for you. When you're breastfeeding, it's usually safe to have up to 300 milligrams of caffeine a day (the amount in about 3 cups of coffee) — but your doctor may recommend less. And remember that tea and energy drinks usually have caffeine in them, too. Talk to your doctor about caffeine during pregnancy.

Remember, small changes make a big difference

Small changes like adding seafood to your plate can add up to big health benefits for you and your baby. So **start simple** — make a small change in your eating routine today.

- Learn about the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and get more resources to help you eat healthy at [DietaryGuidelines.gov](https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov)
- Find more healthy eating tips and recipes at [MyPlate.gov](https://www.myplate.gov)
- If you can't afford enough healthy food, check out programs that can help at [USA.gov/Food-Help](https://www.usa.gov/food-help)

